DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 169 PS 025 421

AUTHOR	App, Marie, Comp.; Grinde, Jane, Comp.
TITLE	Families and Education: An Educator's Resource for Family Involvement. (Revised Edition).
INSTITUTION	Wisconsin State Dept. of Public Instruction, Madison.
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-57337-034-7
PUB DATE	Jan 97
NOTE	98p.; For 1991 Bulletin, see ED 330 489.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publication Sales, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Drawer 179, Milwaukee, WI 53293-0179; phone: 800-243-8782 (Bulletin No. 91406).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Development; *Communication Skills; Discipline; Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; Family (Sociological Unit); Guidelines; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Participation; Parenting Skills; Parents; Parents as Teachers; Resource Materials; Secondary School Teachers
IDENTIFIERS	*Family Communication

ABSTRACT

This handbook for educators offers guidance on ways to understand families, family-teacher communication, the process of reinforcing classwork at home, caring for the whole child, and selected resources. Chapter 1 discusses the climate for family involvement, different perceptions of teachers and families, what families want to know, today's diverse families, and what to do when families do not participate. Chapter 2 provides information on home-school communication, family involvement, family-school communication, parent-teacher conferences, family workshops, family centers in schools, and starting a volunteer program. Chapter 3 provides suggestions for families on parenting, study skills and homework, helping their children learn, and television viewing, in the form of 14 items that teachers and administrators can reproduce and distribute to parents. Chapter 4 discusses family communication, stress, discipline, parenting styles, self-esteem, and issues related to adolescent development and education. Chapter 5 lists selected organizations and programs, diagrams family-community partnerships with the schools, and provides a checklist for schools on family-community partnerships. (DR)

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An Educator's Resource for Family Involvement

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Families and Education: An Educator's Resource For Family Involvement

Compiled and edited by
Marie App and Jane Grinde
Family School Community Partnership Team

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Madison, Wisconsin

This publication is available from:

Publication Sales
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Drawer 179
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53293-0179
(800) 243-8782

Bulletin No. 91406

Revised and approved for reprint March 1993, January 1997

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ISBN 1-57337-034-7

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Printed on recycled paper.

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Foreword

Relationships are the glue of family-school-community partnerships.

- Friendly, supportive relationships between a parent and a teacher who care deeply about a child.
- Warm and nurturing relationships between a child and the senior citizen who volunteers to help him read.
- Respectful, committed relationships between a school principal and the members of the school's site council, both working to make the school a better place to learn.

Relationships enable us to forge strong bonds and kinship. Let's remember that children are at the center of those relationships. The existence of family-school-community partnerships is a profound statement to children that all of us, teachers and school administrators, parents and grandparents, neighbors and community members, care about them.

I am pleased to introduce the third printing of this resource for educators to use in strengthening relationships with families and building partnerships in the community. This book offers practical ideas, reproducible handouts, and how-to's that focus on the importance of good communication.

The book's format encourages duplication of the materials (credit the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction) and is similar to the other family-school-community partnership resources available through the department.

Since the DPI established the families in education program in 1987, Congress passed a national education goal calling for increased parent involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Reams of research, as well as common sense, reaffirm the value and meaning of family-school-community partnerships to children's learning and well-being.

Our goal must be to ensure that every child has a family member or other caring adult connected to and involved in his or her school and learning. I am proud to bring you this collection of materials, and I pledge to continue the department's commitment to creating and improving family-school-community partnerships.

John T. Benson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Acknowledgments

This guide is the result of many ideas and suggestions offered by parents, teachers, health care and human service providers, students, researchers, and others who feel strongly about the importance of the family as the first and most important educator of a child. In 1991, the state superintendent of public instruction convened a committee to development a parenting handbook, but the committee soon decided not to do a handbook, but instead to develop a resource for educators to promote communications with families. The committee's membership included the following individuals, identified with affiliation in 1991:

> Dr. Wendy Coleman, pediatrician, Jackson Clinic, Madison; Kathy Farrell, teacher, Fall River Elementary School; Barbara Hug, home economist, Juneau County; Judy Jax, department chair, Human Development, Family Living, and Community Educational Services; University of Wisconsin-Stout; Raejean Kanter, human growth and development consultant, Department of Public Instruction (DPI); Jane Grinde, director, bureau for school and community relations, DPI; Lis Lusk, family resource coordinator, Sauk County; Jim McCoy, early childhood consultant, DPI; Lynn McDonald, counselor, Family Service Counseling Center, Madison; Linda Oakes, past president, Wisconsin PTA; Carol Phillips, chief, school food service program services, DPI; Paul Possin, attorney, DPI; Steve Small, assistant professor, Department of Child and Family Studies, UW-Madison; Eric Smith, consultant, DPI; Teri Tolan, parent educator, Madison; Brenda White, parent, Madison.

Special thanks to Julia Wickland, Marie App, Margaret Crawford, Barbara Schuler, and Ruth Anne Landsverk, who worked on the content of the book at various times. Marie App designed the cover. Jessica Early, Janet Fishbain, Lisa Hildebrand, and Karen Faster provided editorial suggestions at various points in the production. Dianne Darnutzer, Jill Bremigan, and Victoria Horn assisted with the design. Kathy Addie, Sandra Zimmerman, and Donna Collingwood worked on formatting; and Cail Endres coordinated the printing.

Introduction

Why This Handbook?

Research shows the more parents, guardians, and family members are involved in a student's school life, the more likely that student will do well in school. Educators can significantly increase the chances of students' academic success by establishing regular, positive communication with families.

Who Should Use This Handbook?

Students benefit most when their families help and support their teachers. Thus teachers and administrators should use this book to help them communicate with families about ways to increase student learning.

The material in this handbook can be used year after year to reinforce basic communication, parenting, and learning skills for teachers, families, and students. The more teachers and families are exposed to this material, the more students will benefit.

How Should This Handbook Be Used?

This booklet is divided into five sections.

Sections 1 and 2 contain information and ideas that help schools establish a climate for positive home-school communication.

Sections 3 and 4 include reproducible materials for schools to help families promote learning at home and improve communication skills with their children.

Section 5 contains a list of resources that help teachers and families obtain more information.

What Does This Handbook Provide?

- Practical tips to help educators communicate with families
- Suggestions to encourage families to participate in school activities
- Many reproducible items for staff, students, and families
- Home-school communication assessments for educators and families
- Strategies that create supportive home environments for learning

1

Understanding Families: Suggestions for Educators

Creating a Climate for Family Involvement
Family Involvement: Reconnecting Schools and Communities
Teachers and Families Have Different Perceptions
What Families Want to Know
Today's Diverse Family Styles and Cultures
When Families Don't Participate

Why Family Involvement in Education?

- One-half of a child's mature intellect is formed at home, even before he or she starts school.
- Studies show when teachers involve families in at-home learning activities, families know more about their children's instructional programs, gain confidence to help at home, believe that the teacher wants them to help, and generally feel better about the teacher and the school.
- Research shows that students make higher gains in reading achievement from fall to spring if their teachers involve families.
- Teacher leadership—not the family's educational level, marital status, or socioeconomic level—makes the difference in how successful families are at helping their children and whether or not the children improve their reading skills.

The research is clear and consistent: effective schools have higher levels of family involvement. Therefore, educators should create a climate that encourages family involvement in education.

This can occur through a multifaceted approach, which includes a school board policy. While an individual teacher can be effective, creating a family-friendly climate in the building and district is even better.

What Must Happen?

Nearly 1,000 Wisconsin students, family members, educators, and business and community leaders surveyed cited numerous necessary actions to encourage stronger school-family partnerships in education. Effective programs must involve families, curriculum and staff development, home-school communication, and policies at state and local levels.

Clearly, family expectations vary greatly regarding schools and the needs schools must meet. Communities, administrators, and teachers also have expectations and needs of families. Careful planning and compromise ensure that the needs of both the family members and the school are met and a climate for family involvement is created within the school.

The ultimate concern for family members, educators, and community members is the same—children and their education. Children's best interests are of great importance to any plan for family involvement.

Examining Family Interaction

Educators can help create a climate for family involvement in education by examining attitudes toward family involvement from various family perspectives. Questions for educators to ask include the following:

- How do I feel about family members being involved in education?
- Do I have a sense of the amount of family involvement occurring in my school district?
- What seems to be the administrative view of family involvement?
- Do family members seem to be welcomed within the schools?
- Are community leaders, business groups, or service clubs supportive of the schools and of citizen involvement in the schools?
- As an educator, how, in the past, have I involved family members in the schools?
- How might I, as an individual educator, involve family members?
- Educators should work with families and community representatives to advocate a commitment to improve all children's learning through new partnerships with families and communities.

Types of Partnership

Six types of family-community partnership with the schools are essential to children's learning. Schools should consider each type when developing and implementing their own plan for family participation.

- **Parenting.** Build on parenting strengths and help families improve parenting skills. Facilitate support systems and networks to enable families to effectively nurture their children.
- **Communicating.** Design and implement effective two-way communication practices to reach families, both individually and collectively. These practices should ensure that families and school staff communicate back and forth about their children.
- **Learning at home.** Provide for families and

school staff to work together in developing learning goals and offering opportunities for learning activities at home and in the community to meet the goals.

- **Volunteering.** Recruit and organize volunteer participation from families and the community at-large.
- **Decision-making.** Design governance structure through which parents are partners in policy decisions so that families have opportunities to give their opinions and to participate in decision making about school programs. Recruit families to act as advocates and decision makers and represent other parents and families.
- **Community outreach.** Establish partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community.

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Arnstein, Sheri R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35 (July 1969), pp. 216-224.

Epstein, Joyce L. "School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share," *Phi Delta Kappan*. (May 1995), pp. 701-712.

Family Involvement: Reconnecting Schools and Communities

The single most important determinant of a child's success in school, and ultimately throughout life, is not family status, education level, income, or IQ. It is whether that child's family is involved in his or her education.

This proposition may sound radical, but there is a mounting body of evidence that is difficult to dispute. Study after study shows that when families are involved, children do better in school and schools improve. Students whose families stay in touch with the school score higher scholastically than children of similar aptitude and background whose families are not involved. Programs with a family-involvement component are more effective than otherwise identical programs without one. Schools that connect to their communities by serving as polling places and neighborhood facilities have higher graduation rates. The effect goes well beyond the short term, and it is especially pronounced for children at risk.

Pro-Family Restructuring

Knowing this, how can we address the restructuring of our public schools without first considering the critical role that families play in improved student achievement, the outcome by which our success must ultimately be judged?

Not only should families—the primary stakeholders in the quality of public schools—be involved in the process of restructuring, the primary goal of the entire endeavor must be to transform the relationship between families and schools from one that is distant and wary to one that is intimate and trusting.

If families are not an integral part of the entire learning process, children find it difficult to integrate the separate experiences of home and school. If home and school are in conflict, the children tend to fall behind and drop out.

Some of the most successful programs to transform schools through intensive family involvement have been designed by Yale psychiatrist James Comer. His theory is clear and direct: children learn from people with whom they bond. If the attitudes, behavior, and expectations of the school staff are substantially different from those at home, children often become completely alienated from school by the time they are eight years old.

Effective Strategies

There are a number of strategies that schools can employ to establish an effective family-school partnership. While they are not difficult or complex, for many schools they will definitely involve restructuring.

- School staff must get to know each child well. It is much more difficult to "write off" students people know and care about. For secondary schools, a teacher-advisory system is recommended where each teacher has responsibility and specific opportunities built into the weekly schedule for close interaction with about 20 students and ongoing communication with their families.
- The teacher should make at least one personal contact with each student's family every month over the phone, at home, or in the community if a family member is unable or reluctant to come to school.
- Families should also have at least one opportunity a month to get acquainted with the school. A back-to-school night is great, except that it is held only once a year. Other possibilities include social events, such as a family spaghetti dinner; report card days when families come to school to pick them up; an evening awards assembly to recognize students, teachers, and families for their contributions to the school; an all-day open house; or a weekend family picnic to celebrate the return of spring. The various elements of the school community, such as the PTA, the faculty, the principal's office, or a local business, can take turns sponsoring the events.
- For families to share in the life of the school, they must be welcome in the building at all times. This means blanket permission to do such things as have lunch with their kids; visit the classrooms; use the library; or talk to the principal, guidance counselors, and teachers.

Schools That Welcome

Indicators that say, "This school is open to everyone" might include welcome signs in all languages spoken by school families; a family room equipped with comfortable furniture, a typewriter and/or computer, and telephones; and a corner in the library stocked with recommended materials and readings for families and copies of current textbooks.

The school should be a community resource. Schools that provide their communities with a variety of services enjoy a deservedly better reputation. They are also much more likely to have bond issues approved. Community meetings, adult education, local theatrical productions, health screening, candidate nights, and physical fitness classes all are legitimate uses of school facilities, and all contribute to the well-being of the community. The school should also serve as a primary referral point for needed social services.

Some of these recommendations will cost money, but they are strong preventive medicine. Recent evaluations on dropout prevention programs show that they are too little, too late, yet their cost would probably underwrite what we have been discussing. When we consider that the bill to society for a single unproductive, anti-social citizen is upwards of $55,000 a year, we don't really have a choice. By getting families more involved, we can restructure our schools in a way that reconnects them to the communities they are intended to serve.

This commentary is written by Anne Henderson, who is an associate with the National Committee for Citizens in Education. She is author of The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement, *and co-author of* Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educator's Guide to Working with Parents. *She wrote this commentary for* Policy Briefs, Number 9, 1990, Parent Involvement in School Restructuring, *a publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.*

Teachers and Families Have Different Perceptions

Most teachers realize how important it is to communicate with families, yet they often feel frustrated in their efforts to communicate. One reason may be a lack of home-school communication skills. Another reason may be the differences in perception that exist between teachers and families. Below is a chart compiled by Mendoza and Cegelka of Project P-Pact, San Diego State University.

Differences in Perception That Can Interfere with School-Home Communication*

School	Family
Group - must focus on the whole class or group	**Individual** - is concerned with own child's individual progress, needs.
Established Skills - has knowledge of what child has mastered.	**Emerging Skills** - is concerned with what child is learning.
Present - is concerned with present development of child.	**History** - has the perspective on how far the child has come.
Futuristic - looks to what child will be able to do in the future, career potential.	**Present** - is concerned with here-and-now.
Specificity - is concerned with mastering specific skills.	**Diffused** - tends to see whole child's ongoing development.
Cognitive - sees child more abstractly, able to distance self from child.	**Emotional** - has emotional involvement with child.
Achieved/chosen profession - encourages child to make professional career choice.	**Given** - families accept the child as she or he is.
Dominant - has power position, expertise.	**Submissive** - may feel helpless, uneducated.
Universal - looks for one best method, way to work with all children.	**Individualized** - wants to have child approached and taught as an individual.

*Compiled by Mendoza and Cegelka of Project P-Pact, San Diego State University. Published in *Community Education Journal* (April 1987), p. 12. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

What Families Want to Know

In response to an informal survey, approximately 50 family members from several Wisconsin school districts expressed what they would like to say to teachers and what information they would consider the most beneficial in helping their children learn.

Families Want to Belong

- I want to belong.
- Welcome me to the school; don't shut me out.
- Invite me to school; take the initiative.
- Ask for my input, but don't intimidate me.
- Tell me how I can participate in school activities.
- I would like to be a member of an advisory council or family involvement committee.

Families Want Teacher Contact

- I would like my children's teachers to call me.
- Because I work, I need evening teacher conferences.
- Let me know what my children are studying.
- I want to meet the teachers at least once a month.
- Keep communications clear, brief, and simple, not overly technical.

Families Want Information

- Tell me the philosophy of the school, the channels of authority, and the general goals of each subject studied.
- Tell me the best time to call the teachers, the names of the staff, and their telephone numbers.
- Send me a weekly or monthly newsletter that lists school events, community resources, and enrichment programs.
- I need to learn strategies I can use with my children when dealing with alcohol and other drug prevention, video games, TV programs, peer pressure, and study skills.
- I would appreciate family education workshops or videos to learn about communicating with teens, how to motivate children to study, social pressures, curfews and family rules, college applications, and helping with homework.

Families Want to Help

- Give me ideas on how to complement what my children are learning in school.
- I need ideas for enrichment to supplement my children's classes.
- What can I do to help with homework?
- I need to know what teachers expect at each grade level in emotional, social, and cognitive growth areas.
- If a problem arises with school work, contact me immediately; don't wait for weeks.
- What are your expectations of my children?
- I'd like a family attendance day so I can understand my children's classes better.

Families Want Teachers to Love and Discipline Their Children

- Do something to make my children feel good about themselves.
- Make rules clear and don't put up with inappropriate student behavior.
- Relax when students are acting normally.
- Remind yourselves that you are an important influence in children's lives.
- If I complain about something, don't "take it out" on my children.
- Avoid stereotyping children.
- Praise students for good efforts.
- Contact me about good news, too, not only about problems.
- Tell me your expectations of my children.
- Care about my children.

Today's Diverse Family Styles and Cultures

The family structure in America is changing at a faster rate than ever before. This growth in the diversity of family styles strongly influences America's schools. Teachers must be aware of the statistics and characteristics of modern family lifestyles if they are to successfully involve the families in school activities.

A host of new words describe today's families: traditional, blended, supporting, extended, multigenerational, migrant, minority, single-parent, divorced, dual-worker, immigrant, refugee, ethnic, special education, and families in which the primary language is not English. If teachers are to encourage involved families, they must be sensitive to families' special needs and identify the most effective channels of communication. Teachers may need to take a few extra steps to get families involved in school. Below are some general tips, followed by specific suggestions, for reaching diverse families.

Basic Communication

- Learn about your students to get a clear picture of the different groups of families.
- Ask the families about their special needs, interests, and concerns. Try to identify the barriers that can keep these families from getting involved in your school. Work with administrators to schedule workshops and meetings on the topics that concern families.
- Be sensitive to families' special needs. Sensitivity workshops involving both families and teachers may be one alternative. Be supportive without being overindulgent.
- Ask families when it would be convenient to contact them. Then send notes or call them. Family members may be more inclined to come to the school or get involved after a personal invitation.
- If asked, offer to meet a group of family members in a home to discuss school concerns.
- Provide opportunities for staff and family to get together socially, such as potluck suppers, sports events, art fairs, music concerts, bazaars, and picnics.
- Have a translator available for those families who don't speak English. Some school materials could be printed both in English and other languages. This allows more communication and serves as a good teaching device.
- Ask parents or guardians to serve on committees so their concerns are represented. Get their views on educational goals, school closings, and latchkey programs. Involve families before they feel the need to organize and form special interest groups that could develop adversarial relationships with your school.

Families Whose Primary Language Is Not English

In the 1990s, the largest number of immigrants to the United States are from Asian and Latin American countries. Families from these cultures, as well as others, may expect the school to do its job without a great deal of dialogue; they might feel out of place and disrespectful if asked to offer suggestions to teachers. Often children may miss school because their families may be involved in social agency visits, trips to medical clinics, or other activities. Possible lack of English skills may prevent them from knowing bus schedules, reading road signs, or keeping appointments, especially in large cities. The following are some suggestions for teachers:

- Remember that it may be impossible, even unnecessary, for you to distinguish between an immigrant family, one that is first generation American, one whose family members hold student visas, and others.
- Be aware of actions that might reinforce negative stereotypes of minorities and immigrants. Appreciate different language patterns and ethnic diversity.
- Build trust between teachers and families of all children through focus groups, small discussion groups, and active participation in events.
- Publish newsletters, publications, and displays in languages that all families are familiar with.
- Get to know opinion leaders in the community, how they make decisions, and how they communicate. Tap into this network.
- Send small tape recorders and messages recorded in the family's language to those unable to read English. Children can be taught how to operate the recorder so the family is able to send messages back to the teacher.
- Be aware that applications for free and reduced price school lunches written in Spanish, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Urdu (Pakistani), and Hmong are available from the Department of Public Instruction.

Single Parents

Our nation's divorce rate is 50 percent. Single-parent families comprise 25 percent of all families. It is predicted that nearly 50 percent of all children born in the 1980s will live in single-parent families at some time. Single parents often have difficulty balancing their duties at work and home. They may not have the support usually found in nuclear families and sometimes are trapped in a low poverty level. The unemployment rate for single mothers is about 40 percent higher than that for married mothers. Teachers who understand the stresses of the single parent can better understand the children in these families. The following are some suggestions for school staff members:

- Provide special training for teachers and counselors to help children of single, unmarried, divorced, or deceased parents. This training should include learning the laws relating to single parents.
- Schedule school conferences in the early morning, evening, or on weekends to accommodate working parents. Provide child care at the school during the meeting. Do not assume that all parents have their own transportation.
- Use "Dear Parent/Guardian" or "Dear Families" rather than "Dear Parents" on letters sent from the school to home. Be sensitive about Mother's Day and Father's Day activities.
- Student and parent last names may be different. Check the names before contacting a parent by phone or note.
- Children of single parents may acquire considerable decision-making power by default. Develop a list of suggestions that parents can use at home for maintaining discipline and encouraging students to complete homework.
- Avoid the use of the term "broken home."

Blended Families

Many single-parent families are transitional since many parents remarry. The families created from remarriages are called "blended" families. Within the blended families, certain conflicts may occur that may be more intense than those in nuclear families. Three potential conflicts are listed below.

- Children may perceive that favoritism seems to run along kinship lines. They may feel that parents tend to favor their biological children.
- A parent in a blended family may compensate for perceived unfairness, which may result in lax discipline. On the other hand, disciplining a child often may give rise to conflicts that result in a loss of control or even abuse.
- Conflicts may arise when a child who was given considerable freedom from a biological parent now finds himself with a more authoritarian parent, or vice versa.

Conclusion

Educators must avoid a distorted perception of changing family styles, lest they see them as somehow deficient or inadequate. Other causes, possibly the real ones, are sometimes overlooked. Emerging family forms are the reality, and they need support. Educators must adjust their institutions to meet the needs of all family forms.

When Families Don't Participate

For the most part, families care. They want the best for their children. Teachers should realize that circumstances may prevent families from getting involved in school.

Why Families Have Difficulty Participating in Education

Teachers must learn the causes of lack of family interest and participation in school programs. Surveys will help determine local reasons, but involvement may be limited because families:

- do not have transportation;
- have had negative school experiences;
- resent confronting large, impersonal school-system bureaucracies;
- have experienced racism, classism, rudeness, or indifference in school buildings;
- work many hours and do not have time for meetings, especially if they have children in more than one school;
- are embarrassed about their own abilities or lack of them;
- lack information about the school activities; and
- do not understand written English directives.

Overcoming Barriers

The Institute for Responsive Education summarized five barriers to family involvement.

- School officials may perceive children from low-income families as troublemakers.
- Families may be contacted only when their children are in trouble.
- Administrators and teachers sometimes think that low-income families are deficient so they concen-trate on these families' problems rather than their strengths.
- School staff tend to believe that the problems of hard-to-reach families are the fault of the families, not the school.
- Many poor families have a low assessment of themselves and their abilities to be involved in their children's schooling, yet they want to be involved.

Take School to the Community

When families don't come to the school, the school must go the families. School staff members should be encouraged to become active in the community. The National School Public Relations Association offered the following suggestions for administrators and teachers to accomplish school-community contacts:

- Hold informal gatherings with groups of family members where communication can take place in a nonthreatening setting. Start with the positive aspects of the school and be honest about the challenges.
- Encourage principals, superintendent, and board members to volunteer time on a rotating basis to represent the school at a local site or at a community function. People react positively when they know there is someone who wants to meet them and answer their questions.
- Have principals and their staff members call families with good news about their children.
- Invite community leaders of ethnic groups to help communicate with hard-to-reach families. Develop a network by inviting these leaders to share the concerns of families and then take steps to address those concerns.
- Provide school representatives who are fluent in the language of ethnic groups to convince non-English-speaking families of the school's interest in them and their children. Offer spoken English classes for adults in locations near their homes.
- Hold parent-teacher conferences in any local building that has adequate meeting room where families can come together easily. Try to alternate sites so that families do not always have to come to the school building. Provide transportation and arrange child care. Also, select times convenient for both working and nonworking adults.
- Ask for help. Instead of offering something, ask for something. Solicit families to talk to classes about their experiences and careers or to demonstrate special skills.
- Have the school board sponsor a Speak Up breakfast meeting for families and students and ask them to express their ideas and concerns for the community.
- Well-planned home visits by sensitive personnel are an effective way to get educationally disadvantaged and at-risk students into the mainstream. These visits provide opportunities to share information about the child with the parent or guardian and explain how they can help.

Family-Teacher Communication: Enlisting the Family's Support

Home-School Communication Assessment 1
Home-School Communication Assessment 2
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Techniques for Two-Way Communication
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Communicating by Telephone
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Organizing Family Workshops
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Home-School Communication Assessment 1

Communication Channels

These assessments can be used to stimulate discussion and to develop a profile of a school's communication climate. Check (✔) those channels listed at the top that you use to inform families on the topics listed at the left. This chart will help identify existing communication channels used most frequently or omitted altogether. The pattern of checks in the vertical columns will allow you to analyze your school's communication channels.

	Channels of Communication									
Subject of Information	Students	Local Newspaper	School Newsletter	Home Visits	Friends, Co-workers	Telephone	PTA, Clubs	Parent Conferences	Report Cards	Other
Curriculum										
Children's Progress Attendance										
Extra-Curricular Activities										
Teachers										
School Policies										
School Finance										
Parenting Skills										
Helping Children Study										
Other										

What changes would you like to see in your school's communication with families?

Home-School Communication Assessment 2

Written Communication

Check (✔) the appropriate boxes on this chart to indicate the kinds of written communication used in your school. The more checks you can mark under the first seven headings, the more likely it is your school uses adequate written communication methods to reach families.

	Characteristics of Communication								
Communication Media	On Time	Frequent	Easy to Read	Focus on Academic	Encourage Responses	Important Information	Adequate Distribution	No Distribution	Does Not Apply
Letters Home									
Course Requirements									
Report Cards									
Success Reports									
School Newsletters									
Class Newsletters									
Progress Reports									
Family Surveys									
Student Handbooks									
Classroom Policies									
Meeting Notices									
Activity Calendars									
School Policies									
School Menus									

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Tips for Teachers on Family Involvement

An examination of how to involve families may open the door to alternatives. New twists to old ideas or the discovery of a workable idea once overlooked because of its simplicity may evolve. Keep a few basic guidelines in mind when dealing with students' families.

- Keep it simple.
- Keep it relevant.
- Keep it warm and personal.

Communicate

If ever one word could describe how to involve families effectively in the education of their children, it is "communicate." All of us have our own styles of communicating. We simply need to use them well. Communication can be accomplished in as many ways as there are teachers. A few suggestions follow.

- **Telephone calls.** Telephone your students' families, if appropriate, to introduce yourself before you have any need to call about a problem. Ask what time is best to call about a problem. The best offense is a good defense. Be positive and friendly. (See "Communicating By Telephone" in this handbook.)

- **Written notes**. Write your students' families personal notes, inviting them to visit school or to call you. Notes can also be used to inform families about classroom events or special activities. Let families know the times you can be contacted or when it is best to visit the school.
- **Informal records.** Keep an informal record that will remind you of the content of each contact. This information will help you keep track of family information or concerns by providing continuity from contact to contact.
- **Family cards.** Elementary, junior, or senior high school students can fill out their own 3-by 5-inch family cards with their family members' names and home and work telephone numbers. You can ask the students to add any information they would like you to know, such as interests and hobbies of family members.
- **Classroom newsletters and calendars.** Newsletters are generally well-received. They can be written by administrators, teachers, families, volunteers, or students. They can include parenting tips, school activities, recommended television programs; and they can provide a monthly calendar with school events and brief at-home activities listed for each day. Set a goal for how many newsletters or calendars to send home and when: monthly, quarterly, or weekly; or at report card or conference times. These may be coordinated with district or school newsletters.
- **Class presentations.** While it may not always be possible for family members to attend classroom presentations, invite them anyway. Some, part, or all of the family may be able to attend. Older students can write the invitations. If school conditions and policies permit, provide simple refreshments. If possible, have students make them.
- **Open house.** Holding an open house, either independently or in conjunction with an all-school open house, sets a time for friendly interaction. Welcome families and other adults warmly and be attentive to each. This will help them feel important and comfortable. Individual recognition helps put even the most uncomfortable person at ease and may encourage further interaction with school personnel.
- **Family discussion groups.** If done in an informal setting, these can generate good ideas and positive public relations. Discuss materials you are using, what students are doing in class, special student projects, and directions for assignments, if appropriate.

Families appreciate knowing what is expected of their children. Be specific when discussing expectations. Let families know their help is appreciated. Explain how they can help, and accept their help when it is offered.

If you are invited, visit with families in their homes. They may ask for advice about how to help their children with specific skills. For example, if children are learning to print, show the families how the letters are correctly formed. This will help families help their children.

Let families know teachers are people, too, and are dedicated to their children's success. Meetings with families should be casual and personal. If meetings are formal, use round tables if you have them; circles usually generate greater exchange of conversation and increase discussion. Name tags may help people feel comfortable.

Involve Families Indirectly

There are innumerable ways to involve families indirectly. Schools can survey families about their needs, concerns, preferred meeting times, and what they would like to know about the school. Then materials or meetings can be planned to meet families' needs. Some other ways to involve families include the following:

- **Classroom library.** Stock your classroom library with books and materials families can use with their children. Encourage families to use the school library.
- **Family information.** Know the correct names of family members and the composition of the family.
- **Student recognition.** Commend and reward students with stickers or certificates for achievements and successes. Send these home with the students. Write positive comments on completed assignments for families to see.
- **Group efforts.** Try to coordinate your efforts at involving families with efforts by other groups connected with the school, such as the PTA/PTO. Be familiar with community services so you can serve as a resource for students and their families. Be accessible.

Getting families involved in the education of their children takes time. A teacher who is genuinely interested in involving families will find the time, and the results may be exciting.

Source: Carol Calloway, School District of Superior.

Techniques for Two-Way Communication

Families learn about school programs, classroom projects, and their children in a variety of ways. Schools should provide several ways to reach families, using techniques that encourage two-way communication. Check the techniques you use. Circle two techniques you would like to try this year. Add more of your own.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
1. Send **letters**, notes, post cards, memos, half-and-half letters that ask families to respond (letters may have to be mailed to high school students' families).	☐	☐	☐
2. Send schoolwork home once a week in **a folder** with a place provided for family comments. Require a parent/guardian signature.	☐	☐	☐
3. Develop assignment **calendars** that record students' assignments and invite families to respond.	☐	☐	☐
4. Send **newsletters** reporting community and school activities; include a **mini-survey** about discipline, homework, conferences, other related information, and publish the results in the next newsletter. Include recommended movies, books, television specials, community cultural activities.	☐	☐	☐
5. Ask families to identify two or three concerns before coming to parent-teacher **conferences**. At the conference, listen to families and jointly develop a plan of action.	☐	☐	☐
6. Send small **tape recorders** home to families whose first language is not English. The children can explain how to use the recorder and they can bring messages back to the school.	☐	☐	☐
7. Conduct periodic random **telephone** surveys of families, asking them how well the school is communicating and how well their children are learning.	☐	☐	☐
8. Once a month, randomly select a small group of families to **meet informally** with the principal or a teacher. Listen to their views. Discussion can be open-ended or focused on a specific topic.	☐	☐	☐
9. Involve the **PTA/PTO** and school council in data collection. Representatives from these groups can plan the best activities, find guest speakers, and organize public forums to encourage communication among students, families, teachers, and community members.	☐	☐	☐
10. Organize **classes** for families in which they learn about child development, mental health issues, study skills, and student motivation. These classes can be provided through cooperation with county extension services, mental health agencies, human service agencies, and schools.	☐	☐	☐

Teachers Reaching Out to Families

Teachers are finding that reaching out to families of the 1990s is an increasingly challenging adventure. Students come from various ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds. The following are tips to aid teaching staff when reaching out to families and students:

- Successful communication with families, community, staff, and children depends on the teacher's ability to eliminate all preconceived ideas and judgments. It is not appropriate to assume that all single parents are women, that all families worship, that the children have a lifestyle similar to that of the teacher, or anything else.
- For effective communication, teachers should examine their assumptions about people of color. One cannot assume that color affects ability, motivation, religious persuasion or lack of it, interests, goals, or anything else.
- Similarly, teachers should examine their assumptions about economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles. It is unfair to make judgments about students' ability, morality, goals, or motivation based on a teacher's assumptions.
- Positive reinforcement works well. Every family wants to hear about the good things; for example, their child completed six math problems perfectly, built a wonderful block house, got an "A" on a Latin test, and helped the teacher in class.
- Teachers must be aware that for some children, school is a haven, a safe place. Home may not meet the same standards. Abuse, hunger, or intolerable relationships may prevent successful communication with the home. This does not make the student any less of a person or any less deserving of attention.
- Most families are concerned about their children. If a teacher can talk to a family member about short- and long-range goals for the child, the communication is apt to be successful. The goal may be passing math, writing a one-page essay, or becoming eligible for a team. By having a goal that both teacher and family can work toward, they can openly communicate and work together.
- It is important that a teacher never talk about others (families or students) during a conference or meeting. A family has to be able to trust a teacher (or administrator) to maintain confidentiality.
- Families like to talk about concrete ideas and activities. Therefore, suggesting specific tutors or actual activities that will help the child is a good technique.
- A major part of communication is listening on several levels. Teachers should listen for meanings conveyed by spoken word and body language. They should try to hear what is not voiced. Remember different cultures interpret and use body language in different ways. Avoiding eye contact may be a sign of respect in some cultures.
- Some teachers and some families are people-oriented; others are task-oriented. It is a good idea for the teacher to recognize the differences and allow for them in communication. Misunderstanding, mistrust, and negative situations can easily erupt and swell out of proportion if either participant overreacts.
- Both teachers and families have to be prepared for disagreement. It is usually better to talk about disagreements than to let them fester. It is also important, however, to stress interaction rather than confrontation. Compromise is healthy. A teacher must not punish a child for a disagreement with a family member.
- Teachers should be aware that not all families respect schools or teachers, nor do they feel comfortable with the education programs. A successful teacher will not overreact, but will work within the system to improve matters. Such attempts will frequently work for the good of the district, the child, and the reputation of the teacher. A steady, sometimes slow progress often diffuses the efforts of fringe groups who want to impose their beliefs or programs on others. It also may change the attitudes of some constituents who have been hardened by previous, negative encounters.
- A good way to meet and interact with families and to demonstrate a sincere interest in students is to attend extracurricular events and athletics competitions. Not only will a teacher learn more about the students' interests and abilities, but also the teacher will have an opportunity to interact with students and their families in an informal situation.

Communicating by Telephone

Most often, telephone calls from school to home bring bad news, such as reports of tardiness, incomplete work, or unacceptable playground or bus behavior. Call families to bring them good news, too. Teachers pleasantly surprise a family with a call saying a child has overcome a learning or behavioral problem.

Laying the Groundwork

A positive telephone program must be a cooperative effort among administrators, staff, and teachers. Here are some suggestions.

- If teachers make at least one positive family phone call per week, at the end of a single school year each teacher would have made contact with three dozen families.
- Ask for additional telephone lines if needed.
- Provide your home telephone number to families, and let them know the best times to call.
- It might be possible to take a little time from the regular daily schedule or during teacher preparation time for making calls. Some schools schedule a convenient telephone time for teachers.
- Call in a private area. Teachers should not have to stand at the secretary's desk or ask the principal to leave his or her office in order to use the telephone. The conversation should not be overheard.
- Maintain a log of positive calls to help measure success.
- If the budget permits and a staff member is willing to be available, advertise one evening a week when families and students can call to ask questions or discuss problems. Families who find it difficult to visit school may use this time to call.
- Keep a record of all calls to each family in order to help yourself remember the content of previous conversations.
- Encourage families to call the teacher if circumstances allow this without interrupting school or personal schedules.

Script Outline

This is an example of a typical conversation.

Identify yourself. This is (your name) from (your school).

Give positive reason for calling. I am (child's name's) teacher, and I am calling to tell you that (child's name) wrote a wonderful story that will be published in the school newsletter.

Assert positive feeling about school. We feel our creative writing seminar would be an excellent experience for (child's name).

Allow family ownership. We are looking forward to meeting you and discussing some things you can do with (student's first name) to encourage (him/her) with this special skill (goal).

Invite the family to school. I'll be at the next PTA meeting (or open house or evening forum) and look forward to meeting you there. The meeting is scheduled at (place, date, time).

Sell the meeting. Other staff members who I'd like you to meet will be at the meeting. Other families whose children are (have been) involved in the program will also be there, so you'll be able to get more information then and discuss any concerns you may have.

Reinforce the information. Again, my name is (name), and I hope to meet you soon. If there is anything I can do for you, just call the school, and we'll do our best to help you.

Friendly closing. Thank you for taking time to talk. Good evening.

Tips for Teachers: Helping Families Help with Homework

Teachers can encourage families to talk about and work on school assignments with their children. When families are assisted this way, they become more aware of their children's school program, interact with their children more, and reinforce the teacher's goals for better schoolwork.

Students who know their families are knowledgeable partners and communicate with their teachers also become more aware of their abilities to talk about schoolwork and school decisions at home.

- At the beginning of the school year or semester, send home a list of all major assignments (books to read, papers to write, special projects to complete) and the due dates. Suggest that students write the due dates on the calendar and that adults periodically check progress. This is one way adults can help children avoid last-minute panic to complete assignments.
- At the beginning of the year or semester, send home a note about your philosophy of homework; generally what kinds of assignments will be made and for what purpose; and what influence, if any, homework will have on grades.
- Help students develop assignment notebooks with space for assignment, due date, teacher comments, and family comments. Send home a note about these notebooks and seek cooperation from home in using them. This is a means of daily communication with home.
- Be sure students understand the assignments before they leave class.
- Make homework assignments meaningful, and give students feedback on the assignments. Students will soon lose interest in assignments that are simply busy work or that are never checked. If assignments are worth doing, they are worth feedback.
- Homework assignments should be based on materials that are readily available to students.
- Assignments should not require teaching by the adult at home.
- If homework assignments are not being completed, call the child's home. A phone call may solve the problem, but if not, arrange a meeting with the student and family.

Open House Guidelines

A general open house for families early in the school year gives families a chance to meet their children's teachers, to learn the school's plans and policies, and to hear classroom goals and teacher expectations.

Begin the open house with a general assembly for all families and teachers. As families enter the auditorium or gym, have them fill in name tags and put them on. Encourage teachers (also wearing name tags) to greet families as they come in. A suggested format for the open house follows.

- Principal welcomes families and introduces teachers and others, such as school counselor, PTA/PTO president, secretary.
- If possible, each person introduced should make a few comments (for one or two minutes each).
- Principal talks about the goals for the year and special events.
- Principal invites families to visit their children's classrooms.
- Classrooms are open for the next 30 to 45 minutes with teachers presiding. Refreshments are available in the classrooms or all-purpose type room.

As appropriate, the principal or teacher should answer general questions. These could include:

- What are the school rules regarding visiting, discipline, busing, lunches, homework, cars, and testing procedures?
- When are children taught in groups other than a self-contained classroom?
- How is a child's progress evaluated?
- How much homework is given, and how can families help?
- What level of mathematics will they learn, and how can families help?
- When will children learn computer skills?
- In what family councils or groups can families participate?
- When is the best time to contact each teacher?
- Are there programs for gifted children and children with learning disabilities?
- What is expected in terms of classroom and school behavior?
- What are the names of principals, counselors, bus supervisor, child-care coordinators, food service managers, and PTA/PTO officers?

Even if your district distributed handbooks that answer the above questions, reinforcing what families have read will lead to stronger support from the home. The open house is a get-acquainted session for families and teachers. If teachers have business cards, this is a good time to distribute them. It is a good time for families to sign up for individual conferences to volunteer to assist with a classroom/school activity.

Schools That Say "Welcome"

Directions: Think about the experiences you have had working in your school. Evaluate your school's relationship with families. Read and mark each statement below. Compare and discuss results.

++ = Always
+ = Almost always
✓ = Sometimes
0 = Needs much improvement

1. ____ Office staff greets visitors in a friendly, courteous way.

2. ____ Teachers, staff, and students answer the telephone in a friendly, professional way.

3. ____ A welcome sign and school map are displayed near the main entrance.

4. ____ There is an area where visitors easily can find information about the school and curriculum.

5. ____ An orientation program is provided for new families in the district.

6. ____ Informal occasions when staff and families can get to know each other during the school year are provided.

7. ____ The principal offers monthly hours when families can stop in; regular office hours are available for students.

8. ____ There is a suggestion box where teachers, students, and families can contribute ideas.

9. ____ Families can make appointments with the teachers to visit classrooms.

10. ____ The building is used by the community for planned events.

11. ____ Alternative communication methods are used with families speaking limited English in order for them to understand the curriculum and participate in activities.

12. ____ Information about school rules, parent-teacher conferences, school and classroom policy, and bus and lunch schedules is available to families.

13. ____ Assistance is given to families to help them choose appropriate educational programs for their children.

14. ____ Students are encouraged and praised by staff.

15. ____ Local businesses and associations offer information and enrichment projects to students.

16. ____ A resource center that provides parenting information for families and teachers is available.

17. ____ There is a bulletin board where families can post news and announcements.

18. ____ A computer or other source is available for families to gain access to information about events and curriculum.

19. ____ Principals and staff are willing to listen to family concerns about incorrect student placement and are willing to make adjustments when appropriate.

20. ____ Whenever possible, staff is willing to honor family requests about class assignment.

Welcome to a New School Year

Date ____________________

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Welcome to a new school year.

We all have a big job ahead of us, but working as partners, we know we'll have a successful school year. We hope to make this school an even better place to learn and grow than it was last year. The staff sets goals to help every student make the most of each day of the school year.

Soon we will be letting you know about special conferences and events for families and students, but we want you to feel comfortable visiting your school. We look forward to working with you and hope you will find the time and opportunity to call, visit, tutor, or share your experiences in our classrooms. Research shows that students are more successful in school when their families help them at home or get involved in school activities.

Please call and visit often.

____________________ Principal

____________________ Telephone

____________________ Teacher

____________________ Telephone

Help Me Know Your Child

Date ________________

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I invite you to share with me the talents, interests, and habits of your child, ______________, so that I may be prepared to teach in the best way possible. Please share concerns about your child so we can have a cooperative team approach to education. Call and let me know when you would like to visit our classroom or just to talk about your child. The best time to reach me during the day is from ______ to ______ p.m. at ________________ (telephone).

1. My child learns best by ____
____

2. Some things I do at home to help my child learn are ________________
____

3. Right now my child's goal/dream is _________________________________
____

4. You will know my child is having problems when _____________________
____

5. The thing my child likes best about school is ______________________
____

6. One difficulty my child has at school is ___________________________
____

7. When my child is having difficulty learning something, I find it works best to ___
____

8. Questions I would like to discuss at a parent-teacher conference include ______
____

Please return this form to Teacher ________________________________

Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Successful

Teachers need the help of families to do the best possible job of educating children. Through conferences, families and teachers can offer suggestions to one another that can help children learn. Children's progress, behavior, motivation, and reasons behind successes and failures can be discussed.

Conferences with the families of individual children early in the term to discuss the progress and potential of the child will help get the year off to a positive start. Some of the topics that may be discussed are:

- the child's overall ability to do school work;
- the child's progress in all the subject areas;
- samples of the child's work;
- special abilities or interests the child is showing;
- books and materials used in the classroom; and
- social skills exhibited by the child in and out of the classroom.

Preparing for the Conference

Teachers may contact the family by telephone or letter to arrange a conference. Send a sign-up sheet home with students to give families a chance to indicate the three best times for conferences. Confirm in writing the time for the conference. (This handbook includes samples of a letter and questions for families and teachers that may be duplicated and sent to families before the conference.)

Teachers can improve the family-teacher relationship by encouraging family cooperation, inviting suggestions, thinking of families as people who want to help, recognizing individual and cultural differences, respecting children's feelings, and living up to professional expectations. Teachers must not preach, downgrade family situations, overlook cultural differences in families, or use offensive expressions such as "broken home."

The parent-teacher conference should be held in a location that allows private, uninterrupted conversation. Families and teachers should be seated on the same level, preferably away from the teacher's desk. Arrange for comfortable seating, with good lighting and ventilation. Organize samples of the children's work and test results so they are easily accessible and will complement the conference plan.

Teachers should write down the topics they plan to discuss with the families. Teachers need to know beforehand what they hope to accomplish, communicate, and suggest, and what specific steps can be recommended for families to help improve their children's education. Teachers should discuss children's strong points as well as things that need improving.

During the Conference

Give waiting families folders of their children's work. It makes waiting easier.

Begin the conference with a friendly general remark unrelated to the child. When speaking about the child, start the conference on a positive note, stressing some good points about the student. Emphasize the child's strengths. Use words all family members will understand; do not use technical educational jargon. Do not present a long list of negative concerns to families; work on a few negatives at a time.

Ask families questions to find out about their concerns. Listen carefully so you can separate facts from emotional feelings. Accept comments from families without showing surprise or disapproval.

Give families time to ask questions, to interrupt, and to disagree. Relax and try to gain insight into the families' attitudes toward their children, school, and you. Do not argue with families or impose your opinions on them. If you feel you must change a viewpoint, be as diplomatic as possible.

If a child has a problem, ask the family to suggest an approach that could be used at home to help the child. If applicable, suggest alternative approaches for joint consideration. This makes the family a participant in developing plans and may lead to a discussion that will help the family adopt a realistic plan. When working on solutions, try to set up a timetable. Ask for the family's help and help them accept responsibility for a share of the child's success or failure.

End the conference by summarizing what has been said. Finish with a friendly remark. Thank the family for their concern and time. Treat information as confidential. Document conference notes for future reference. Remember that you represent your school district and that the final goal of parent-teacher conferences is to help children.

Follow-Up

If possible, after the initial family conference, follow up with a phone call or written note. The note might thank the family for attending the conference, ask if the family has begun to follow through with the suggestions made, encourage the family to discuss the conference with his or her child, and invite the family to call the teacher or school to check on the child's progress or simply to keep in touch.

If this follow-up is not possible because of the numbers involved, try to contact those families whom you sensed might have been uneasy or who expressed negative concerns.

Getting Ready for a Conference

Date ____________________

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The success of your child is important to both of us. We can gain new awareness of particular needs, strengths, and limitations by sharing our observations. Will you please take the time to meet with me in your child's classroom? I am hoping one of the following dates and times will be convenient for you. Please check the one you prefer.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

I have circled some questions for you below. Perhaps we can discuss them when we meet. On the reverse side of this sheet you will find a list of questions families often wish to discuss with their children's teachers. Please read the list, choose those questions you would like me to answer, and return this form to me by next Monday. Our cooperative effort will make this a productive year for your child.

Sincerely,

____

Teacher Questions for Parent or Guardian

1. What does your child like most about school?
2. What would make school more interesting for your child?
3. What activities take up your child's leisure time?
4. What activities do you and your child enjoy doing together?
5. Does your child have a quiet place to study at home, and do you monitor study time?
6. How do you reinforce good behavior at home?
7. What TV programs do you and your child enjoy at home?
8. Does your child get along well with his or her peers?
9. How is your child not meeting your expectations?
10. Are there any attitudes you hope your child will change?

Parent or Guardian Questions for Teachers

1. What is my child's class schedule?

2. Is my child working up to his or her ability?

3. Are children grouped for reading and math? What group is my child in, and how are children selected for each group?

4. What are my child's strengths and weaknesses in major subject areas?

5. Does my child need special help in any subject? If so, how can I help my child at home?

6. What will my child be learning this year in reading, math, and science?

7. How much time should be spent on homework, and how can I help with homework?

8. How is my child's work evaluated?

9. What standardized tests will my child take this year, and what will the results be used for?

10. What discipline procedures do you use in the classroom?

11. Does my child get along with other children? With you?

12. Does my child respect the rights and property of others?

13. Does my child show any behavior, such as squinting or irritability, that may be signs of a medical or emotional problem?

14. Can you mention other ways I can help my child reach academic success?

15. What special interest activities are available for my child?

Fifty Ideas for Family Involvement

These ideas could be used at an inservice or workshop on teacher-family communication. Family involvement takes planning, and a good program takes time to establish. Family involvement programs are successful if they

- provide information about which families really care or which they really need;
- are convenient for families;
- are administered in a supportive climate; and
- use a variety of communication methods.

Listed below are fifty ideas for family involvement. Mark those that you

(+) tried with success within the last three years.
(0) tried, but with limited success.
(✓) plan to do this year.
(x) think will not work in your school.
(/) have never tried.

Some of these ideas can be facilitated by teachers; others need an administrator's initiative to be implemented. In small groups, teachers can share their successes and offer practical suggestions to those teachers who have experienced limited success. Encourage teachers to analyze these fifty ideas, to suggest ways to make ideas work, or to offer alternative ones.

1. ____ Schedule parent-teacher conferences at the convenience of both parties, either after school or in the evening. Sometimes a visit to the home may be the only way to visit a family. Teachers may offer this option.

2. ____ Distribute an evaluation for parent-teacher conferences. Ask how effective the conference was and what additional kinds of information families want about classroom activities, communication, or other concerns.

3. ____ Sponsor a family-child or family-faculty athletic event, such as a one-mile race, basketball game, or tennis tournament.

4. ____ Allow families to play together in the school gym at a weekly family recreation night.

5. ____ Send home unit goals so families can help children reach the goals set by the teacher.

6. ____ Let younger children take envelopes or folders home on Friday to their families with the week's work enclosed. Invite two-way communication on the envelope or a preprinted postcard.

7. ____ Organize field trips or classroom activities, and ask for family participation.

8. ____ Offer computer and family math programs families and students can learn to use together.

9. ____ Invite families to select a book or chapter or poem to read to their children's class. This emphasizes a lifelong reading commitment.

10. ____ Encourage students to adopt pen pals who are business leaders. The letters often provide the impetus for getting busy executives involved in school.

11. ____ Invite families to volunteer to help with after-school activities in which their children show interest (drama club, music, Girl/Boy Scouts, other).

12. ____ Establish a homework hotline. This could be a tape recorded message to call, a computer modem hookup, or a family network.

13.____ Have a monthly birthday calendar for students and staff posted in the hallway. Have the school food staff make cupcakes or a birthday cake for celebrants. Add new students when they arrive. The calendar could also be distributed in homes or sold as a money-maker.

14.____ Make a bulletin board available for families to share photos and other memorabilia.

15.____ Invite children new to the district or school and their families to a Get-Acquainted Hour the week before school starts.

16.____ Invite new teachers and new families on a tour of the district. Point out facilities available in the area, places that could be used for field trips, boundaries of attendance area, youth center, and other community sites that may be of interest.

17.____ Develop a slide presentation or video orienting families and students to the school.

18.____ Announce a family visitation day followed by an after-school meeting during which families can offer constructive suggestions or ask questions.

19.____ Place a "Welcome to Our School" sign and a map at the school entrances.

20.____ Organize a partner system for new students. Students who will make newcomers feel comfortable are good ambassadors; they also build self-esteem if they participate. Call the family and describe your effort to make the new student feel welcome. Plan activities and follow through to cover at least two weeks. New families also could be assigned a partner family. Welcome them with packets of information on the school and community.

21.____ Sponsor a talent show that involves students, families, faculty, and administrators.

22.____ Develop a well-organized volunteer program. Let parents, guardians, grandparents, nonparents, and business people know they are needed.

23.____ Invite families to help with instructional activities for students, such as bike rodeos, book and video swaps, theater workshops, or art shows.

24.____ Encourage a families' group to sponsor a health fair at school in which various community agencies bring exhibits and displays.

25.____ Work with the Chamber of Commerce, Realtors, or other groups to send a packet of information about the school to new residents in the community and invite them to visit.

26.____ Hold a school-community awards day. Let students, staff, and volunteers nominate recipients from the school and community for various services and excellence. Certificates of appreciation can be given to the nominees and details can be released to the press.

27.____ Request that families who visit the school complete a survey about their interests, needs, and concerns.

28.____ Obtain family surveys on key issues, policies, home-school communication, community needs, and interests. Ask a local club to mail the survey and count survey answers.

29.____ Ask students, perhaps as a classroom project, to conduct a survey of families to evaluate the school and collect ideas for improvement. Distribute survey results to all families.

30.____ Improve the quality and frequency of the school newsletter. Set up an idea exchange by asking families to send in ideas. Publish the ideas in future issues. Check with your state's National School Public Relations Chapter for help.

31.____ Publish a curriculum calendar or syllabus in your school newsletter or in your local newspaper.

32.____ Ask other local organizations to print family involvement tips and information about programs in their publications.

33.____ Ask the local media to cover school board meetings if this is not standard procedure.

34.____ Design an up-to-date logo, perhaps with the help of an art student, so people will immediately recognize letters or notices from your school.

35.____ Set up a speaker's bureau. Include students, families, community leaders, and school staff who will be willing to talk about the school's programs to interested individuals, groups, and businesses or who are willing to share interests and talents with the students.

36.____ Encourage school and community summer activities workshops and enrichment programs.

37. ____Have a seminar for single parents. Think of ideas about how they can become more involved in school. Be prepared to listen to their unique problems and help them find solutions. Have a seminar for two-career families, too.

38. ____Organize discussion sessions between the principal or superintendent and the students to promote better communication.

39. ____Conduct a class for families on health and nutrition concerns; it could be taught by the school nurse, a registered dietitian, or human service agents.

40.____ Make sure families of students at risk are aware of resources, tutors, or support services to help them solve their school-related problems.

41 ____ Provide research on such things as average hours of sleep per night by grade, number of hours devoted to homework, television viewing habits, and other topics.

42.____ Ask your community agencies to lend their vans or buses to transport families and senior citizens to school functions.

43. ____Try to get media coverage of special school events.

44. ____Place suggestion boxes in key locations in the school and community. "I Have An Idea" cards near the boxes encourage positive contributions. For this to be effective, someone needs to respond to each suggestion.

45.____ Attract families to school events by putting their children on the programs. Children can introduce speakers, perform, serve as ushers, be greeters, or have many other duties.

46.____ Plan an evening movie (film or video) night for teenage students, families, and teachers. Hold a discussion of the movie afterward.

47.____ Initiate enrichment courses or evening talks on communication, discipline, peer pressure, study habits, careers, or alcohol and other drug abuse for junior high school students and their families.

48. ____Invite a few families and community leaders for an informal meeting with the principal. They might get an update on school programs or information about staff concerns that may be looming (possible alcohol use among students, antisocial group formation, or other problems that are family-related).

49.____ Encourage families to attend athletic events. When their children participate as band members, athletes, cheerleaders, or in some other capacity, families usually will attend. Work on getting other families involved also. Publish an activity calendar in your local newspaper that includes academic as well as athletic events.

50. ____Exude enthusiasm when you talk to families. Let them see that you really are interested in them and what they are doing.

Organizing Family Workshops

Workshops are an excellent way for schools and family organizations to inform families about children's development, skills, abilities, curriculum, and course content. Once a decision has been made about the target audience, planning can focus on how best to address their concerns.

Workshop Format

- Consider the interests and needs of the audience.
- Determine the information base before launching into a presentation. How much do most families already know?
- Determine what equipment, materials, handouts, and questionnaires will be needed. Remember that visuals can break up the monotony of a session.
- Map out the agenda, including registration, presentations, breaks, meals, small group discussions, sharing of comments, summary, and evaluation.
- Choose a time and length that is convenient for the target group. Remember that many families work during the day and that they may become restless after a couple of hours.

Workshop Location

- The location of the workshop should be accessible if it is to be successful. The location should be near public transportation and provide access for individuals with disabilities.
- The facility should be large enough to accommodate all planned activities, especially if the participants will divide into groups.
- Find out if the facility has or can provide all necessary equipment. Often items such as chalkboards, microphones, and flip charts can be provided, thus eliminating the need to transport such items.

Workshop Speakers

Finding good resource people is very important to the success of a workshop. Decide how these speakers fit into the workshop. Do they have information that cannot be gained from other sources? What is their history with the subject area of the workshop? Are they sensitive to the issues? Have they given successful presentations to similar groups?

- Identify the issues that need to be emphasized or conveyed.
- Tell the speaker which messages she or he needs to be clear about.
- Research community groups, state and national organizations, and professional groups to find which are currently involved in similar activities. Contact local teachers, counselors, and school administrators to find out what can be learned from their personal experience.
- Don't overlook your own school's or district's staff, including teachers, counselors, and psychologists.
- Ask your local speakers' bureau, library, and professional associations for their lists of public speakers.
- Check with county extension staff.

Publicizing the Workshop

Publicity can make or break the workshop. If people do not know about the workshop, they cannot participate.

- Make each person feel his or her attendance is important. If families feel it is necessary or helpful to participate, attendance will likely be higher.
- Encourage word-of-mouth communication. Suggest that everyone bring a friend.
- Design fliers, posters, and news releases, and decide how and where to distribute the materials.
- Use the local media. Send an announcement of the workshop to local radio and television stations for airing as a public service announcement. Send a news release to the local newspaper. Include the date, place, time, charge (if there is one), purpose of the workshop, and the name and telephone number of a contact person.
- Take advantage of former successes. Highlight those items that made the last workshop or seminar a success.
- Use the expertise of other community groups to publicize the workshop.
- For individual contact, send invitations and notices at least three weeks prior to the workshop.
- Follow up one week before the event with phone calls or correspondence.

Conducting the Workshop

Set up registration tables where participants can sign in upon arrival. This not only helps determine attendance but also provides an excellent record of names and addresses for follow-up.

- Have name tags available for each participant.
- Have workshop packets available for participants, if appropriate. This saves time and allows participants an opportunity to become familiar with the planned activity.
- Allow time for participants to fill out a questionnaire before the workshop begins to find out what they already know; have them complete another one six or eight weeks after the workshop, to gain feedback on the effectiveness of the activity. Feedback is important in planning further workshops.

Source: National Urban League, Inc., What Students Need to Know, Education Initiative, New York, NY, 1989. Contact: Stephanie G. Robinson, Director of Education. (212) 310-9000.

Family Centers in Schools

Whenever parents walk into their children's school, do they feel at ease? Does the school have the warmth and friendliness they expect from a place in which their kids spend six to seven hours each school day?

Rather than checking into the school office when a parent arrives and risking a less than friendly greeting from a harried staff member, would a parent rather check into a family center and be greeted by a friendly volunteer? At a family center, a parent can pick up a name badge, select a volunteer job to do, or just check in and take a quiet and unnoticed walk to her or his child's classroom where he or she can observe learning in action. The parent can also learn about a class to take or opportunities for networking with other parents. The parent might pick up a project to take home, get some ideas for enhancing learning opportunities for the family, or read the minutes of the latest site council meeting. Maybe the parent can check out the video of the latest school board meeting, or, if really lucky, sit down and do a volunteer project while viewing the video in the family center.

Parent or family centers are among the newest ideas in school reform today. In Chelsea, Mass., where Boston University is undertaking one of the most ambitious and comprehensive educational reform projects in the nation, the establishment of family centers is one of several initiatives that link the home with the school system. In the Boston University/Chelsea Partnership, each school also has developed school leadership councils that offer extensive opportunities for family involvement in the life of the school, including the opportunity to participate in screening candidates for teaching positions. At the high school, parents participate in a program designed to reduce truancy and dropout problems. Chelsea also has established a citywide Parent Information Center.

Family centers make parents feel more welcome at school and increase their involvement in their children's education, says Vivian Johnson, education professor at Boston University and author of a report called "Parent Centers in Urban Schools: Four Case Studies." Successful family centers strengthen school-family relationships and that in turn results in improved learning for children, says Johnson, whose study cites evidence that a high level of parental participation is associated with improvement in the academic achievement of children.

A family center provides adults with a room or space set aside for their own use at the school; facilitates communication among and between families and the school; and serves various needs of families so that parents and other adults can turn their attention to helping and supporting their children.

A well-designed family center can help a school's learning environment in numerous ways. It can:

- make the school an accessible, safe, and friendly place for parents to gather;
- improve communication among families and between home and school;
- promote greater multicultural understanding among the school's families;
- demonstrate tangibly that parents and other adults are welcome at the school;
- serve as a hub for promoting parent education by linking with community resources and carrying out a wide range of home-school partnership activities that enhance students' learning; and
- coordinate parent and community volunteer services that are available to teachers and the school.

Setting up a parent/family center is not difficult, but it takes strong and diplomatic leadership by a committee whose members really believe in the concept and have the support of school administration and staff. Otherwise, it's too easy to be swayed by such obstacles as "we don't have the space" instead of devising creative alternatives.

The success of the family center hinges on ownership. Parents, especially those who have not felt comfortable in school, need to feel the center belongs to them. Perhaps this is the special project of the PTA or PTO, the site council, a homeroom with students and parents, the district community education council, or the family-school-community partnership team. Remember, it should be as inclusive as possible, with the steering committee representing all of the school's families. A good beginning is to review, "A Tool for Improvement: Parent Action Research," a 15-minute video from the League of Schools Reaching Out (available for loan from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction).

Who should be involved in the development and then implementation of the plan?

- parents or other family members who reflect the community's cultural and racial diversity;
- teachers;
- other school staff members, especially custodians, secretaries, and counselors;
- principals, assistant principals, or district administrative staff members;
- government and agency representatives;
- business and community leaders (the earlier these people are involved, the better tie-in the school will have to the community and possible sources of funding);
- representatives from the religious community;
- family resource centers that are already in the community;
- agencies that provide parenting information and classes;
- library staff; and
- students.

Someone needs to take charge in organizing the committee to establish the center. A parent and school staff member might co-chair the committee. Outlined below are the committee's duties.

Establish the Center

1. Decide on a purpose and goals.
2. Conduct a needs assessment. This is the time to get all the various perspectives.
3. Locate a site.
4. Identify staffing and funding resources.

Coordinate Center Activities

1. Use data from the needs assessment to establish a budget and plan activities.
2. Find ways to link the center's activities with the school's and community's other goals, events, and resources.
3. Serve as an ongoing advisory board to center staff.
4. Publicize the center's activities and accomplishments to garner sustained support.
5. Identify strategies for raising funds to support center activities.

Evaluate Activities and Accomplishments

1. Evaluate accomplishment of goals and effectiveness of center activities.
2. Ensure responsiveness to all segments of the parent group.

The following key points summarize the factors essential to organizing and maintaining successful parent centers:

- Everyone, including families, school staff, and the community, should experience the benefits offered by the family center.
- Involve as many different parent, school, and community perspectives as possible from the start to engender a sense of common ownership.
- Set a timeline, assign tasks and responsibilities, and maintain momentum.
- The family center must be perceived as an accessible and safe place to go wherever it is located. The center should offer a welcoming and friendly atmosphere where families can relax, visit with one another and with staff, and obtain help and services that will meet their families' needs.
- A family center does not need a large budget to get started. More important is a firm commitment to the idea and a willingness to explore all possible sources of support.
- Give primary responsibility for decorating, furnishing, and supplying the family center to participants to help them take pride in the center and feel at home there.
- The successful functioning of a family center depends on the selection and training of effective staff as well as the support and encouragement of the administration.
- Families and school staff will support the center if the activities meet families' needs and if teachers perceived that the center is enhancing children's learning.
- Success in reaching out and involving all families requires the center to be a caring and inviting place that meets families' needs.
- From the beginning, set clear objectives and plan for evaluations.

For more information, ask for "Organizing a Successful Family Center: A Guide and Resource," adapted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction from the book of the same name published by the California Education Department. Contact Jane Grinde of the DPI's Family-School-Community Partnership Team at (608) 266-9356.

How to Start a Volunteer Program

Families and senior citizens are largely untapped resources for schools, yet many of them would be willing to help if asked. A volunteer program in the school can

- reinforce the instruction of teachers;
- enrich the educational opportunities of children;
- supplement the curriculum by making available the talents and resources of the community;
- broaden community understanding of school needs and goals; and
- promote school-community relations.

How to Start

- **Examine your needs.** How can school volunteers help?
- **Investigate the climate.** Do teachers want to work with volunteers?
- **Talk to representatives** of the groups you want to involve in the school volunteer program. These include the school board, teachers, librarians, PTA/PTO, senior citizen groups, Chamber of Commerce, local service clubs, university extension, human services agencies, and local businesses. Ask them if you can attend a meeting of the organization to make your pitch.
- **Approach the organizations well in advance** of the time you would like the volunteers—about three or four months. Be specific about the kind of support and the number of volunteers you need.
- **Provide a brief article** for the organization's newsletter and follow-up your request with a letter of thanks.

Plan Goals and Organization

- **Select goals** for your volunteer program that have specific, measurable objectives. For example, if your goals are to raise student achievement in reading and math, reduce absenteeism in high school, or improve the community's attitudes and involvement in schools, how will you know whether these goals have been achieved?

Establish a system for recording volunteer hours and types of contributions. Use the data to tell the community of your program's achievements and degree of involvement.

- **Plan the organization.** Write a job description for the district-wide school volunteer coordinator and decide what skills this person should have. Determine who will interview and screen volunteer applicants. Who will coordinate the volunteer program within each individual school? Who will receive the teachers' requests for volunteer assistance?
- **Write job descriptions** for all the tasks for which volunteers will be sought. Teachers and librarians should list what kinds of help they want and at which hours of which days.
- **Get written school board support** for the school volunteer program. This support gives the program added prestige in the community. The volunteer coordinator should make periodic reports to the school board.
- **Learn the health requirements** for school volunteers, such as tubercular skin tests or chest x-rays. Perhaps you can arrange to have volunteers take the test at one site or arrange for transportation to a health clinic.
- **Check on state policies** relating to volunteers. Can volunteers ride the school bus, receive insurance coverage, serve in their own child's classroom, bring preschool children along on days they work at school, or receive free school lunches?

Maintain Volunteer Recruitment and Morale

- **Plan recruitment strategies.** Some school volunteer programs produce their own leaflets and posters; some send letters to families of students; some leave printed bookmarks in the local library. Find out where other community agencies get volunteers and how and where other school volunteer programs recruit.
- **Maintain volunteer morale.** The coordinator must keep in touch with volunteers and teachers who participate in the program and provide ways for them to meet and discuss the program. Volunteer appreciation and recognition take many forms: teacher's thank you, notes from students, formal recognition ceremonies and dinners, honor certificates, and workshop attendance.
- **Motivate volunteers.** Job satisfaction is the best motivator; be sure the volunteer is matched well with the job. Invite volunteers to the school's social functions. Give more challenging work to volunteers who desire it; for example, volunteers

may want to learn word-processing to help with their work. A verbal thank you or short notes of praise sent to each volunteer are simple but effective ways of showing appreciation and building motivation.

Evaluation

- **Plan for a continuing evaluation** of the program. Many of the results of a good school volunteer program cannot be measured the change in a child's attitude toward learning, improvement in a student's self-image, the warmth of the volunteer-child relationship—but all participants in the program should be asked to evaluate the program from their own point of view. Evaluation should discover if the program's specific goals are being reached.
- **Establish a communications system.** Communications should include a) personal and phone contact with coordinators and other program staff members, b) meetings for volunteers to discuss their service and learn about the program and other opportunities, c) a school volunteer newsletter or column in the school newsletter sent to all volunteers and program participants, and d) an annual report from the school board that the program "makes a difference."

Further Reading

Light the Way for Kids: School Volunteer Resource Guide. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841, (608) 266-9356.

These suggestions are adapted from School Volunteer Program, National School Volunteer Program, Inc., 300 N. Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Reinforcing Classwork at Home: Reproducible Suggestions for Families

3

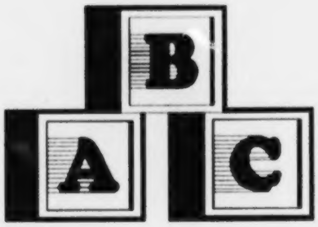
Children Learn What They Live
A Good Foundation for Learning
Help Children Read
Help Children Write
Help Children with Social Studies
Encourage Children in the Arts
Help Children with Mathematics
Help Children with Science
Study Skills and Homework
Homework Tips from Families to Families
Television and the Familiy: Guidelines for Families
Ten Ways to Help Your Children Make the Most of Their Day
Weekly Assignment Guide
Make It a Family-Learning Summer!

*Children Learn What They Live**

If children live with criticism,
They learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility,
They learn to fight.
If children live with ridicule,
They learn to be shy.
If children live with shame,
They learn to feel guilty.
If children live with tolerance,
They learn to be patient.
If children live with encouragement,
They learn with confidence.
If children live with security,
They learn to have faith.
If children live with approval,
They learn to like themselves.
If children live with acceptance and friendship,
They learn to find love in the world.

Adapted from Dorothy Law Nolte

**Tense and number have been changed.*



A Good Foundation for Learning

Every child can succeed in school, but success is different for every child. Success in school is achieved through reaching learning goals as well as communicating and cooperating with other children and adults.

Foundation for Children's Success Is the Home

Achievement in school cannot be imposed on children by teachers. It begins in the child-family relationship with the skills and attitudes taught to the child. Family members are children's first and most important teachers and these role models are critical in the learning process. Important skills and attitudes for success in school must be taught by families before a child enters school.

Developing Attitudes

- **Security.** A child's greatest asset in school and in life is a sense of self-worth. Families of successful students provide a constant, secure atmosphere of encouragement and support in which youngsters may test and apply their growing knowledge. Home is a haven of acceptance and love as well as a place of challenge and demand. Give children unconditional love. This develops their self-esteem and gives them behavior to model.
- **Limitations.** As children develop, they are constantly testing the limits—physical, social, and intellectual—of where their mastery ends and the mastery of other people or forces must be acknowledged. Families of successful students teach them to respect limits, yet permit them to risk exploring those limits while seeking to expand their world. The goal of discipline is to have children internalize limits and boundaries set by families. Discipline is an element in showing love for children.
- **Routine.** Children thrive on orderliness, particularly when it comes to time. Families of successful youngsters keep fairly regular schedules and inform their children of the elements of the schedules. When plans are changed, children are updated so that they hold clear expectations and experience the satisfaction of having their expectations fulfilled. As children get older, families should include them in planning so that they can feel responsible for input.

Early Learning

- **Children learn by doing**. Give them many opportunities. Let them try new things. Give them simple directions to follow. Let children get involved in activities at home.
- **Lead children to think**. Instead of telling children everything, ask them questions that will make them think of the solution. Let them count money, measure baking ingredients, separate objects, sort and classify various collections.
- **Encourage children to use their senses**. Talk with your children about how things feel, smell, taste, look, and sound. Use descriptive words and let children make comparisons, such as "soft as a kitten," "gritty as sand."
- **Let children try their own way** of doing things. Even if you know an easier way, let children use their ability to solve problems in their own way. Not only will their skills improve, but also their self-confidence and self-esteem will grow.
- **Give children time to practice** whatever they are learning. Most tasks require much repetition, thinking, and time. Use a tone of voice that will encourage children to try again.
- **Enjoy your children**. Share their excitement of learning with each new experience. Communicate warmly with them. Express yourself clearly so children will learn by your example to do the same.

Basic Skills Children Need

These skills are necessary if children are to learn how to study well in school. Families must help children develop these skills.

- **How to pay attention.** Before speaking to a child, call his or her name and make sure he or she is paying attention.
- **The desire to listen.** Do not constantly repeat yourself. Tell children once.
- **The ability to express themselves verbally.** If you express yourself clearly, children will learn by your example. Children should feel free to ask questions.
- **The ability to carry on a conversation.** Talk to children and have them talk to you. They will learn to carry on conversations with others.
- **Language skills can develop early.** Play letter games with your children as you take a walk or wait for an appointment: Name three things that start with "b," or what rhymes with "moo"?
- **Knowledge of time.** Give children a task to complete within a certain time. Let them know they have done well.
- **Understanding the use of numbers.** Families can teach children to count toys and everyday household objects.
- **Planning a job and following it through.** Children should learn to complete a task they have begun and to help clean up after a job is done.
- **Waiting for something.** Children should learn that it is not always possible to have what they want and that time and effort go into working for what they want. Success and rewards in school come after hard work and improvement.
- **Getting along with others.** Children learn how to get along with others from families. Children will imitate families' reticence, boldness, politeness.

Fostering Basic Skills

- **Allow for choices**. Allowing children to make choices builds their sense of independence and self-esteem. Let your child choose between an apple or cereal as a snack or between one method or another of putting away toys.
- **Read aloud to your children** and, as they grow older, encourage them to read aloud to you. The single most important thing families can do to help their children become good readers is to read aloud every day.
- **Take children on outings** to the park, museum, zoo, entertainment centers, historical sites, civic events, places of employment, libraries, bookstores, nature trails, and shopping malls. A variety of activities stimulates the mind and creates a storehouse of good memories.
- **Teach children** how to use books, paper, ruler, scissors, crayons, tape, glue, and drawing tools.
- **Encourage memorization**, beginning with numbers, colors, and the alphabet. Build upon these to create more challenging recall games.
- **Create a safe environment**. Childproof the house by keeping household poisons and other hazards out of reach.
- **Prepare children for new events**. Information reduces fear of the unknown. If your child is going to the dentist or hospital, for example, talk to your child about what to expect. When you go away, tell children where you are going and when you plan to return.
- **Encourage pretending** and make-believe games and stories so that children can flex their imagination and creative skills. Answer questions that children ask to encourage their curiosity.
- **Introduce more advanced resources** for learning as children develop. Such resources include the dictionary, atlas, globe, history book, encyclopedia, and thesaurus.

Help Children Read

Here are some tips that will encourage children to read and enjoy books.

- Buy a "how-to" book on the latest craze—jogging, skateboarding, hairstyles, or other fad.
- Subscribe to a children's magazine. (Consult your local children's librarian for recommended titles.)
- Use night-time reading as a reward for getting to bed on time.
- Give bookstore gift certificates; then visit the bookstore.
- Show genuine interest in books your child brings home.
- If your child chooses a book from the library that is too difficult to read, read it aloud and let the child talk about the pictures, if included in the book.
- If the child misses three or more words on a page, offer to keep the story flowing by reading every other page, paragraph, or sentence.
- If the book is too easy, have your child read it anyway to build fluency and confidence.
- Read to your child often.
- Sit next to your child with your arm around him or her when reading.
- Provide a variety of reading material: magazines, pocketbooks, comic books, library books, newspapers, and "difficult" books.
- Encourage children to read signs, ads, billboards, cereal boxes, anything.
- Buy educational games that build vocabulary, visual memory, and word recognition.
- Play oral word games while you are driving the car, cooking, waiting in a doctor's office or restaurant. "Can you think of a word that rhymes with 'that'?" "Say a word that starts like 'mother'." "How many fruits can you name?"
- Buy magnet letters for kitchen appliances. Encourage children to build words, then sentences.
- Praise your child for any progress, such as remembering a new word, pronouncing a word correctly, recognizing a difficult word, being attentive, reading with expression.
- Have your children bring their school readers home and listen to them read.
- Periodically interrupt their reading to ask questions that encourage higher-level thinking skills, such as "In what ways are these two boys alike? What might happen next? How would you feel if you were in this situation?"
- Create a reading corner with a special bookshelf and light for children.
- Give a diary, notebook, or special stationery as gifts.
- Have your children read an article to you from the newspaper as you do quiet household chores.
- Encourage your children to read aloud to younger brothers, sisters, or other family members.
- Be a reader yourself. If your children see you reading for enjoyment, it will seem like a natural part of their lives.

Help Children Write

Reading and writing skills are closely related. Families have important roles in guiding children's writing skills. Be involved and active!

- **Create an environment** that nurtures the sharing of language and experiences. Talk about the things done together. Read to and with your children frequently.
- **Label items** that belong to your children, for example, "Jill's Toy Box," "Ben's Cars."
- **Let your children see you writing** notes and letters so that they associate writing with real-life functioning. Let children see you revising your writing so they learn that revision is natural.
- **Read and accept with enthusiasm** what your children write. Avoid being critical. Provide help with spelling, punctuation, and usage.
- **Find a quiet, suitable, well-lighted place** for children to write. Keep dictionary, pencils, pens, paper, and envelopes handy.
- **Encourage developing writers** to write frequently. Supply real audiences by asking children to contribute to family communications such as letters, captions for pictures and albums, grocery lists, notes to babysitters and siblings.
- **Encourage children to write** for information, samples, and free brochures. Read aloud some of their writings.
- **Praise children's efforts** at writing. Encourage initiative and respect uniqueness. Don't compare children's writing to that of siblings or friends.
- **Display children's writing** in a special place. Let children know that publication is a part of writing and that families enjoy what has been shared.
- **Look over the writing** children bring home from school. Keep the writing in a folder so that they can see progress.
- **Find out about writing and spelling programs** in school. Daily writing, small classes, and frequent feedback from teachers are ideal. Ask what you can do at home to complement work in school.
- **Volunteer to work in classrooms**. High-quality writing programs include individualized assistance that can often be provided by adult helpers under teacher direction.
- **Encourage children to read** skilled authors. Writing is learned, in part, by reading. Good literature programs foster effective writing.
- **Look for and respond to good student writing** that is published in school and local newspapers, magazines, and journals. Encourage participation in and recognition for writing contests and awards.
- **Encourage students to solve problems** in any area by "writing through" the steps. Writing the directions for solving a math word problem is one example.
- **Stress getting ideas down on paper** before thinking about usage or editing.

Help Children with Social Studies

Here are some tips to help children's study of social studies.

- **Visit places** like museums, industries, newspapers, and radio stations, and discuss what you see there.
- **Check the course content** of your school's social studies program, and encourage your children to participate in research.
- **Research your family history**. Prepare a family tree. Interview older relatives and tape record their stories.
- **Discuss daily news** as part of the family dinner conversation.
- **Encourage hobbies** such as collecting stamps, flags, travel posters, dolls in native costumes, or foreign pictures.
- **Take children on trips** whenever possible and visit historic sites along the way.
- **Encourage children to participate in** school clubs, debate teams, foreign language clubs, and civic activities and projects.
- **Attend cultural and ethnic programs** and festivals with your children.
- **Watch television programs** that deal with history or current world events. Talk about how they relate to past events in history.
- **Play board games** that help children learn about industry, history, money, real estate, government, and geography.
- **Encourage children to** watch a daily news show.
- **Discuss opinions** of world and national leaders'.

Encourage Children in the Arts

Arts education includes the study of visual art, theater, music, and dance. Arts education trains students to express their imagination, to be interested in creations by others, to be expressive and responsive, and to pursue quality. It challenges and extends human experiences and adds to the quality of life for everyone. Mastery of the arts is not necessary for creativity and growth. For some children, expressing ideas and feelings is difficult, and teachers can use art, music, and movement activities to help children express themselves. Creative, expressive activities have no right or wrong answer, so children can be free from the fear of failure.

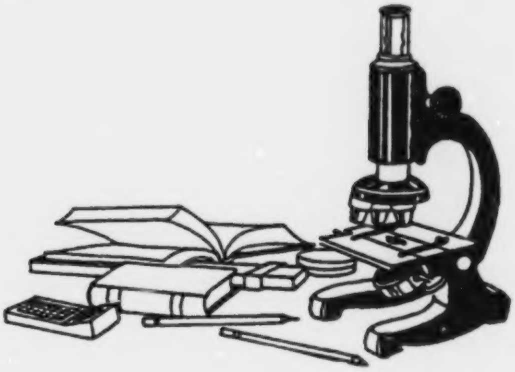
Many times an idea can be expressed better through an artistic or movement-oriented presentation than a written or verbal explanation. A poem, song, drawing, or dance may be a fitting medium for illustration of an idea. If children cannot perform or create new works of art, they should be taught enough about the arts to be able to appreciate and enjoy the arts as observers. This sheet lists some tips to help families encourage the arts for their children.

- **Encourage and praise children** so they gain self-confidence.
- **Provide a variety of materials** for children's art projects and an appropriate place for them to work on art. Include materials for various mediums such as paints, chalk, clay, paper, beads, metals, plastic, and others.
- **Visit art museums** where children can see a variety of art styles.
- **Watch TV shows with children** that focus on art topics.
- **Provide opportunities** for children to attend live music and dance performances.
- **Visit ethnic fairs** and cultural performances in the area.
- **Encourage children to display artwork** and perform music, dance, and drama for groups, in and out of school. Display and share children's artwork in the home.
- **Help children understand** that developing skills in the arts is a slow and demanding process and that patience and persistence are important traits for success.
- **Visit teachers** to find out what cultural arts are addressed, and ask how you can enhance your children's learning.
- **Accept and praise children's creations**, realizing that even undeveloped scribbles and poorly proportioned drawings represent a necessary and important stage in children's development.
- **Enroll your children in local arts**, crafts, music, dance, and theater classes, if they are interested.
- **Attend your children's concerts** and recitals regularly.
- **Help children understand** and accept the responsibility of being a member of a musical or theatrical organization by ensuring attendance at rehearsals and concerts. Also, monitor practice time.
- **Ask children what they feel** about certain art expressions without passing judgment on their feelings so they feel free and safe in sharing themselves.
- **Remember** that the opportunities you give your children to learn about the arts are lifelong gifts.

Help Children with Mathematics

At a very early age, children are able to use simple mathematical ideas. Their chances of success can be increased by providing activities to develop those ideas and by maintaining a positive attitude toward mathematics. This sheet offers suggestions for various activities you can do with young children.

- **Add and subtract** small numbers. Check receipts for items purchased.
- **Help children read price tags**.
- **Set the table for meals and count** how many plates, napkins, glasses, knives, spoons, and forks are needed. As children grow, count the number of utensils and multiply by the number of place settings.
- **Show children how to measure** the ingredients in a recipe of something they enjoy eating. Later, have them reduce the recipe or double or triple it.
- **Talk about the different shapes** of items such as a circle, square, rectangle, and triangle.
- **Note the difference** between small and big, tall and short, close and far, right and left, plus and minus, high and low, and up and down.
- **After reading a story**, ask a child what happened first, second, and last.
- **Show the number of cents** in a nickel, dime, quarter, half dollar, and dollar. Later show how to make change from a dollar.
- **Show how to estimate** by guessing the length of a paper, table, room; then measure it with a ruler or yardstick.
- **Add the cost** of five food items from a newspaper ad. Add the cost. How much money would be left from $20?
- **Teach your children the days of the week** and the months of the year. Let them find important dates on a calendar such as family birthdays, religious holidays, Valentine's Day, Independence Day, and Halloween.
- **Help children understand clock time and calendar time**.
- **Help them read thermometers and scales** to measure temperature and weight.
- **Talk about simple fractions**. Using a catalog, figure the cost of items when they are on sale at one-quarter off.
- **Watch a TV program** with your children. Ask them to tell how many minutes are used for commercials compared to the number of minutes of program time. Make a bar graph that shows the length of time for each.



Help Children with Science

Children derive excitement from learning about science. There are basic skills used in science classes from kindergarten through college. When children know how to use these skills, they increase their chances of becoming better science students and problem-solvers.

- **Encourage students** to raise questions about science material being studied.
- **Take family trips** to the zoo, science museum, botanical gardens, farm, laboratory, and aquarium. Visit the library to find books or computer programs about science.
- **Watch science-related shows on TV.**
- **Read science-related articles** in the newspaper with your children.
- **Encourage hobbies** in which children collect, sort, catalog, pool, observe, take notes, measure, compute, plant, and make graphs.
- **Ask the science teacher** often about your children's progress in science class, and ask to see your children's completed homework.
- **Do not rush children** when they are exploring, testing ideas, building things, calibrating instruments, constructing physical and mathematical models, and asking questions.
- **Encourage working cooperatively** with others in groups since scientists work mostly in groups and less often as isolated investigators.
- **Encourage communication skills** since scientists need to have clear expression when explaining new ideas, findings, and evidence.

The following basic skills are used in science classes:

- **Observing.** Using the five senses to gather information through personal experience.
- **Communicating.** Reporting observations orally, in written form, or through graphs, charts, models, records, descriptions, and calendars.
- **Measuring.** Developing a description of properties through length, area, volume, weight, mass, or temperature.
- **Classifying.** Recognizing patterns and collecting or sorting groups of objects based on common properties.
- **Making models.** Constructing and using physical and mental representations of objects and ideas to clarify explanations or to show relationships between things or events.

Study Skills and Homework

Homework helps children learn. It helps them remember what was taught in class. It allows children to study a topic in depth. Students who excel in academics cite family encouragement and help as factors that influence their success. Here are some ways that families can help their children with homework.

Environment

- **Provide a table or desk** and good lighting in the study area.
- **Limit noise and distractions** in the house when children are studying.
- **Supply paper, pencils,** markers, pens, erasers, dictionary, thesaurus (particularly for children in grades 7-12).
- **Consider controlling music and TV**. Children study with fewer distractions when music and TV are off, although it is possible for some children to do their homework in front of the TV.

Attitudes

- **Set aside a "quiet time"** each afternoon or evening for reading, letter writing, and games, starting when children are young. Creating a regular pattern will help your children get into the homework habit.
- **Talk to the teacher** if your children continually seem bored by busy-work assignments or homework that seems above their ability level. Remember, students naturally complain about homework.
- **Follow up on homework assignments** by asking to see your children's homework after it has been returned by the teacher.
- **Help children accept** that their efforts make a difference and that the hours they spend studying determine success or failure. The next time they bring home test results, written comments, or report cards, discuss the reasons why they did well or poorly. Help them relate their efforts to the result.
- **Try to be home and available** during homework time so children know you value homework as another part of their education.
- **Reward children for improvement**. Use praise. Sometimes give them a special treat, trip, family activity, or privilege for special achievement.
- **Sign and date your young children's homework**, even if the teacher does not request it. Let the teacher know that you are interested.

Assignments

- **Check that your children understand** assignments. If there is a problem, work through a few examples with them.
- **Ask to see your children's homework** after it is done. Praise them for good efforts, and point out errors to be corrected. Offer explanations to help with corrections if you know the material.
- **Contact the teacher** if you don't understand the assignment or if your child has a special problem. Do not hesitate to call the teacher!
- **Do not do the children's homework** for them. Encourage them to do the work.
- **Establish a routine time to do homework**. Some children study best before school, some as

soon as they get home, some right after dinner. These schedules should be flexible enough to allow trade-offs and shifts when necessary.

- **Discuss your concerns with the teacher** if you think your children are getting too much or too little homework.

Study Skills

Some activities that families do with their children lay the groundwork for learning important study skills. Here are some things families can do with school-age children.

- **Research a topic** that interests your children. With your children watching and helping, show them how to find and use maps, charts, library databases and catalogs, encyclopedias, diagrams, almanacs, cookbooks, automobile and appliance manuals, or glossaries and indexes.
- **Create a graph** or chart and tell children what can be learned from it.
- **Help them organize** a chart or notebook in which they can write assignments, due dates, grades received, and a place where a family member can check assignments.
- **Demonstrate notetaking.** One effective method is to list important ideas on the right-hand side of the page; then, in a left-hand column, write down key words. By covering the right-hand column and looking at the key words, the students can easily and quickly review for tests or presentations. Point out that continual review—looking over the key words every night—will prepare a student for both quizzes and long-term retention and synthesis of ideas.
- **Help children concentrate** by removing distractions while they are studying, such as TV, gadgets, and magazines. Encourage children to get a drink, sharpen pencils, find paper and eraser, and ask questions before they sit down to study. Help children extend their attention span. If children need practice in concentration, set an alarm clock to ring in 15-, 30-, or 45-minute intervals until they can concentrate for longer periods of time.
- **Review with your children.** The key to learning is practice and review. The repeated process of trial and error is necessary for academic success. Listen to your children recite multiplication tables, spell words, practice new vocabulary, define difficult science words, or practice Spanish vocabulary.

Homework Tips from Families to Families

Homework is serious business, and its timely completion is important to your child's success in school. Some reasons why a student may be assigned homework are to:

- develop skills and abilities that can be aided at home through practice and drill;
- reinforce lessons and concepts introduced in the classroom;
- complete an assignment or work on a special project; and
- finish work missed due to absence.

How Can Parents Help?

- **Get information from school.** Most districts send home information about homework or the district's homework policy, sometimes in the student handbook. Review this information with your child to ensure that she or he understands expectations. Call the district office if you do not receive this information.
- **Communicate with teachers.** Ask your child's teacher to let you know whenever homework is not being completed. If her or his grades are suffering, if you are concerned about the amount of homework (too much or too little), or if her or his work is not being completed, contact the teacher.
- **Make or buy an assignment book** with a space for each class. Have your child write down all assignments and due dates. Keep a handle on homework by setting up an assignment check system with your child's teacher: the child writes down the assignment, the teacher checks that it is correct, you sign that it was completed, and the teacher signs that it was turned in.
- **Keep a calendar.** Many teachers hand out lists of major assignments and test dates for the calendar year. Put the assignment due dates and test dates on a centrally located family calendar.
- **Help, but don't do.** Be available to help with questions during homework time, but don't give away the answers. Often, students get stuck because they do not understand the assignment, rather than the material. Encourage your child to re-read the assignment, the textbook, or class notes, and to check with the teacher before leaving class if there is any doubt about the assignment.
- **Read along.** If your child is assigned to read a book, get yourself a copy and read it. Your shared discussion and enjoyment will encourage your child, and may further her or his understanding of assignments and the material itself.
- **Establish a work routine.** Set aside at least one hour each evening, before play or television, for studying, reading, or working on school projects. It will help your child establish priorities and a routine.
- **Be flexible with house chores.** If your child is in extra-curricular activities, you may have to lighten her or his household chores some days to allow time for homework.
- **The last resort.** If your child refuses to do her or his homework, make it clear that you will make no excuses for her or him and she or he is responsible for the consequences.

Getting Down to Work

- **Sort it out.** For the first few weeks of the school year, help your child set up a study plan for the night. If she or he has a number of assignments, she or he may want to alternate reading and writing assignments. Do tougher ones first, when energy levels are higher.
- **The right place.** Most educators say that homework should be done in a quiet place free of distractions. Some families establish a quiet time for homework. Adults do paperwork, bills, or read while younger children are encouraged to draw or do puzzles.
- **The right time.** Right after school may not be the best time for doing homework. Many children need to take a break after school. A slot in the daily schedule may work better than a clock time.

Television and the Family: Guidelines for Families

After the family, television may be the most pervasive influence on child development in our society. By high school graduation, the average teen will have spent more time in front of the television than in the classroom. Television viewing is linked to obesity, violence, and aggressive behavior. Following are some tips to help families avoid television's negative impact and use it as a positive, creative force in their child's development.

Factors to Consider

- **Time.** Three to five hours a day of watching television obviously limits your child's available time for other activities. All children need to play, read, talk, and be with their peers and adults.
- **Violence.** Families should know that viewing violent programs may increase a child's tendency to be more aggressive. By watching television with your child, you can point out that the violence on television is not real, and that an actor has not really been injured. You can also stress that violence is not an appropriate way to solve problems. The best solution is eliminating the most violent programs from your child's viewing schedule.
- **Nutrition.** Children are increasingly the primary target for food products advertised on television which may leave them with a distorted, unhealthy idea of how they should eat. One study found that 37 percent of children ages six to 11 shop or do chores before dinner and the National PTA estimates that five million to seven million latchkey children are routinely left alone after school each day. Commercials for meat, milk, bread, and juice make up only 4 percent of the food ads shown during children's viewing time, leaving much advertising time for fast foods, candy, presweetened cereals, and other high-calorie foods.
- **Learning.** Because television relies heavily on pictures, difficult issues are often poorly conveyed. Too much television may lead your child to seek simple answers to tough problems.
- **Sexual behavior, alcohol and other drug use.** Television exposes children to adult behaviors in ways that portray these actions as normal and risk-free. Sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and other drugs are often shown in popular or exaggerated terms. Children may be left with the message that "everybody does it."
- **Commercials.** The average child sees more than 20,000 commercials a year on television and advertisers spend roughly $700 million a year to make sure that their sales pitches reach large numbers of children. More than 60 percent of the commercials are for sugared cereal, candy, fatty foods, and toys. Most young children do not understand the difference between programs designed to sell and those that entertain.

What Can Families Do?

- **Set limits**. Limit TV to one or two hours per day, and offer children other options to keep them busy. Read books together. Save old or vintage clothing for dress-up. Play board games. Take a walk, toss the Frisbee, play a musical instrument. Using a tape recorder, create and record your children's monologues or "voice letters" to mail to grandparents.

- **Break the habit**. Remember, watching TV may be more habit than choice for families and children. Overcoming the word-of-mouth campaign on school playgrounds will require both firmness and creativity.
- **Plan**. Use the TV guide or newspaper to choose positive programming. Turn the set on only for certain programs and turn it off when they are over. Approach a TV program as you would a movie—decide which show to see and talk about it afterward. This will make TV even more understandable to your child.
- **Participate**. You are your child's most important role model as he or she learns how to live in the world, and he or she will learn the most from your views about the televised material you see together.
- **Know what your child watches**, watch it together, and take time to discuss the programs. TV may offer a good chance to discuss difficult topics—family life, war, sex, work, love, etc. If you forbid your child to watch a certain program, be sure to explain why.
- **Resist commercials**. Explain the purpose behind commercials to your child and how many of the products advertised may not contribute to his or her health or well-being. Turn off the sound when a commercial comes on. What did you learn from it without the music and words? Define these terms for your child: assembly required, batteries not included, each sold separately, and part of a balanced breakfast.
- **To avoid commercials**, you may want to explore public television, tape ahead for future viewing, or establish a family video library.
- **Express your views**. When you are offended or pleased by something on the air, call or write your local station manager, the network, and the program's sponsor. Be specific—cite the time, date, channel, and why you did or did not approve of the program or product advertised.

Mail a copy of your complaint to your Better Business Bureau and the Children's Advertising Review Unit, Council of Better Business Bureaus, 845 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022.

Your local or state Parent-Teachers Association may be a useful ally. Many schools organize a "Television Awareness Week" in which children reduce their television viewing time and write about what they did instead.

Adapted from Guidelines for Parents: Television and the Family, *a 1991 brochure published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, P.O. Box 927, Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927.*

Ten Ways to Help Your Children Make the Most of Their Day

Here are ten ways to make sure your children are the best they can be.

1. Find out if your children have homework. Insist that it be done before other activities. Check each morning to see if your children have work that needs to be returned to school.
2. Encourage your children to read at least one book each week, preferably something they enjoy.
3. Talk to your children every day about the importance of learning.
4. Take time to listen to your children. Try to understand their feelings if you expect them to understand yours.
5. Encourage your children to constantly do better.
6. Be willing to accept responsibility for your children's failures, as well as successes, in school.
7. Insist that your children get a good night's sleep.
8. Insist that your children have a nourishing breakfast.
9. Make sure that your children are in a happy, receptive frame of mind when they leave home.
10. Make sure that your children have their materials (books, notebooks, pencils, etc.) when they leave home.

Adapted with permission from the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Weekly Assignment Guide

Name ____________________________ Week ________________________________

Subject	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment
	Due	Due	Due	Due	Due
	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment
	Due	Due	Due	Due	Due
	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment
	Due	Due	Due	Due	Due
	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment
	Due	Due	Due	Due	Due
	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment	Assignment
	Due	Due	Due	Due	Due
	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade

Make It a Family Learning Summer!

You can continue the learning process at home by taking advantage of the simple pleasures and opportunities that summer offers.

Remember the backyard picnics, the surprising things you discovered on leisurely walks through fields and neighborhoods, and the delight of reading adventure books under a shade tree?

You can use everyday experiences to reinforce language, math, and science skills. Talking with your children, allowing them to show you what they can do, and involving them in your interests is an ideal way to learn and will enrich both of your lives.

- **Help your child learn map skills**. On vacation or at home, ask her or him to find the cities or landmarks on your route via roadways or latitude and longitude.
- **Help your child learn alphabetical order**. Underline the key word on five or six packaged items in your kitchen—corn, macaroni, catsup, etc.—and help your child arrange them in alphabetical order.
- **Feed the birds**. Help your child identify the local birds that come to your feeder. Read and talk about their nesting and migrating habits.
- **Visit a farmers' market** or tend the family garden together. Children are intrigued by the process of planting, growing, and harvesting produce. Read about the life cycle of plants. Review a chart of the food groups together. Set aside a special place for children to grow their own plants. Let them help you select ripe, seasonal vegetables and prepare a special recipe. You will reap rewards in the pride your child takes in contributing to enjoyable family meals.
- **Take a study trip**. Before traveling, visit the library for books about the history, lore, and geography of places you will see. Invite your child to teach you what he or she has learned. Help him or her write letters to area chambers of commerce or state parks to request more information. Be sure to go on the historical walks or tours you read about once you get there, and encourage your child to collect materials to create a scrapbook of summertime memories once you return home.
- **Take advantage of summer programs** offered by your local library and recreation department. Many libraries sponsor story hours, reading incentive programs, and educational movies. Many communities also sponsor organized sports, swimming lessons, or arts and crafts programs for children. The new skills your child gains will increase his or her confidence.
- **Contact your school district** to find out what enrichment programs are offered during the summer. Many schools feature opportunities to learn new and interesting things, as well as the chance to practice skills learned during the school year.

- **Visit a state or county park**. Most offer guided nature hikes and interpretive programs for all ages. Take a picnic lunch or camp out, and bring your favorite guidebook to point out native species of animal and plant life to your child.
- **Start a collection**. Whether it's stamps, insects, rocks, or leaves, a collection will help your child understand variations between similar objects. Set aside a special corner or space for the collection. Many collections cost little or nothing, except time, and generate interest and pride in learning.
- **Read, read, read!** The lazy afternoons of summer are a wonderful time to immerse your child in the reading habit. Make a weekly trip to the library together, and introduce your older youngster to the children's classics.
- **As you read to younger children**, before you reach the end of a story, stop and ask them what they think will happen. Finish reading the story and compare the actual to the imagined ending to help your child comprehend what he or she is reading.
- **Help your child understand sequence**, cut a comic strip from the newspaper, read it aloud, cut it in sections, and have the child put it together again in correct order.

4

Caring for the Whole Child

Communication Is Crucial
Minimize Family Stress
Build Children's Self-Esteem
Boost Children's Self-Confidence
Positive Discipline
Does Parenting Style Matter?
Saving the Family Meal
Help Teens Establish Values
How to Communicate When You're Angry
Teens in Your Family? Read This!
How Teens Want Families to Communicate
Should Your Teen Work During the School Year?
About Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse
About Sexuality
About Career planning
Guidelines for Latchkey Children
Evaluate Your Involvement

Communication Is Crucial

Communication within the family on issues ranging from career choices to alcohol and other drug abuse is an essential element of a strong and supportive home environment for a school-age child.

At every stage of development, children in today's society are confronted with situations that require them to make critically important life decisions. Teachers and families must provide children with accurate information to help them make sound and rational decisions.

Educators can give valuable assistance to families trying to help their children handle sensitive social and personal issues. By sharing their goals and ideas, families and educators can reinforce each other's efforts in a positive way.

An Acquired Skill

Decision-making is not instinctive. It must be learned. Children must learn to take responsibility for their actions through a rational thinking process, considering alternatives, anticipating results, selecting the best alternatives, and being accountable for the consequences. The decisions they make should be based on their family's religious, social, and educational experiences.

A healthy family is one that listens. Open and straightforward discussion of potential problems is the key to preventing them. An open system of communication in the home will allow children the opportunity to sort through their emotions and cope with the bewildering array of behavioral choices that the outside world offers.

Family attitudes toward issues such as sexuality or alcohol and other drug abuse play a major role in shaping young people's attitudes and behaviors, but many families don't feel comfortable or adequately prepared to discuss these topics with their children. Young people who don't hear about these issues from their families may turn to their peers for information that is frequently inaccurate or potentially damaging.

Suggesting Strategies

Educators can ease families' difficulties by suggesting strategies for opening the lines of communication with their children. This section of the handbook offers a number of possible strategies, including guidelines for families to communicate about:

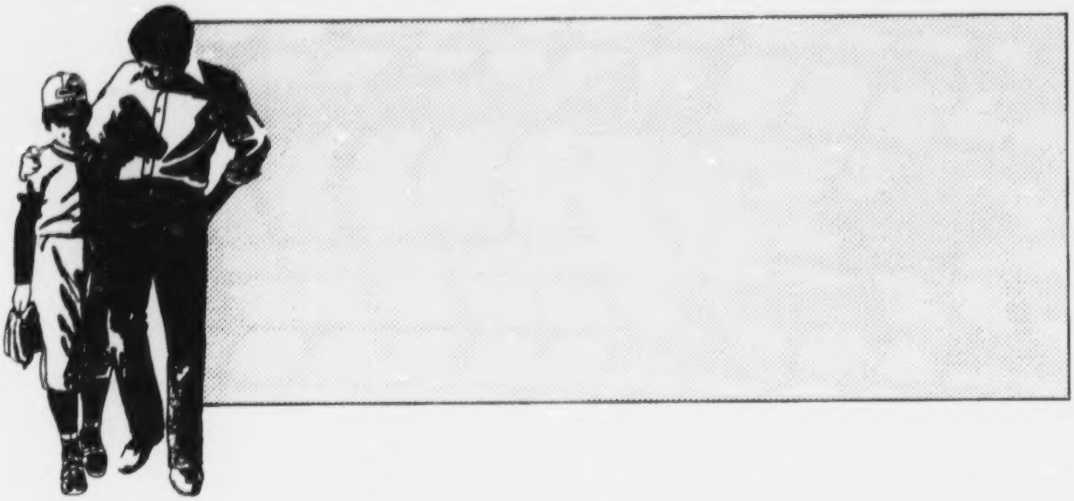
- alcohol and other drug abuse;
- sexuality;
- children at home alone;
- problems with teenagers; and
- career planning.

Each family unit is unique and will develop its own distinctive system of communication. We hope the ideas contained here, however, act as a springboard for further dialogue and exploration on these issues.

Minimize Family Stress

Many families live life in the fast lane. Families and children rush to work, school, lessons, practice, meetings, home, and bed. The stress children experience is overwhelming. The best way to help children with their workload is to reduce unnecessary stress as much as possible. Here are some suggestions.

- Start the day on a positive note with pleasant words and calm routines. Wake up 15 minutes earlier if that's what it takes to prevent a morning rush.
- Try not to pass your stressful feelings on to your children. Let them talk about their own worries.
- Slow down when spending time with your children.
- Let your children grow and develop at their own pace, according to their own developmental timetables.
- Encourage children to play and do things children do.
- Do not push your children into levels of learning that they are not yet capable of performing.
- Build in some free time every day so your children can choose activities that interest them.
- Provide children with a peaceful home atmosphere, shielded from unnecessary disputes and conflicts.
- Reward children for their small and big successes. Let them know you are proud of them for who they are, not who you want them to be.
- Plan special times together as a family, without television, and show a genuine interest in what children say.
- Accept and respect your children's feelings.
- Give children a chance to solve their own problems. Guide them toward wise decision-making by introducing limited choices that match their emotional maturity.
- Correct children's behavior without tearing down their self-confidence. When they misbehave, tell children they are loved but their behavior is unacceptable. Explain why their behavior bothers you.
- Save newspaper reading and paper work until your children are asleep. Spend time reading to your children, playing board games, or planning a family outing with them.
- Do not make quick, snap judgments and criticize children unnecessarily. Try focusing on the positive things children do rather than stressing the negative side.
- Do not come home in a foul mood; remember that children also have bad days in school.
- Do not make a habit of leaving your children at home alone in the evenings and on weekends.



Build Children's Self-Esteem

Children, especially pre-teens and teens, often have a shaky sense of who they are because they are going through many changes. It is important for children to achieve a positive feeling of self-worth. Families can help children develop self-esteem if they become their children's ego-builders. Here are some ego-builders to use with your children.

- Reward children for a job well done with praise, a special privilege, or increased responsibility.
- Emphasize the good things they do, not the bad.
- Avoid comparisons with brothers, sisters, and peers.
- Give compliments often, even if it seems they aren't listening. Make sure compliments are sincere and specific.
- Hug your children often.
- Include them in discussions and really listen to their points of view. Allow them to practice making decisions.
- Define limits and rules clearly and enforce them, but allow leeway within these limits.
- Show children that what they do is important by talking about their interests and attending their activities and games.
- Remind children of their past accomplishments, especially when they are feeling down.
- Focus on their strengths by referring often to their good qualities and accomplishments.
- Respect their right to be themselves and their need for independence.
- Help develop realistic goals when children demand too much of themselves.
- Spend time together and share favorite activities.
- Be a good role model. Let your children see you feeling good about yourself.
- Tell your children they are terrific and that you love them.
- Discuss problems without placing blame or commenting on a child's character. Children are more likely to look for a solution if they don't feel attacked.
- Use phrases that make your children feel skillful, such as
    That was a great idea!
    I like the way you did that.
    Fantastic!
    You must have been practicing.
    You're on the right track now.
    That must have taken a great deal of thought.

Boost Children's Self-Confidence

Adults are expected to help their children with many things they've never even heard about before they had a family. One of these important jobs is helping children boost their self-confidence.

What Is Self-Confidence?

Self-confidence is how people feel about themselves, how much they like who they are. Self-confidence slates people for success or failure; it influences how people live their lives. Children with high self-confidence enjoy a quiet sense of self-respect, self-worth, and security. Self-confident children know they have value and do not feel they need to impress others. They feel adequate, positive, worthwhile, loved, and in control.

It would be easy for families to say "Everything is fine. Of course we love our children and think they are worthwhile." Unfortunately, there is a big difference between being loved and feeling loved. Many families love their children, but somehow their children fail to get the message even though they are told, perhaps over and over, that they are loved.

The way families *treat* their children influences children's feelings about themselves more than what families say. Since children value themselves to the degree that they are valued, the way families show they feel about their children actually builds self-confidence and self-worth.

Children use the words, body language, judgments, and attitudes of those around them to put together pictures of themselves. Young children think that their families are all-knowing and all-powerful, so the way their families treat them is the way children think they deserve to be treated.

Signs of Low Self-Confidence

Some children use defenses or cover-ups to hide feelings of inadequacy. The following are a few of the more common cover-ups that may be used by children and may indicate lack of self-confidence:

- **Habitual tattling.** Children "tell on" other children in order to make themselves look better.
- **Bullying.** Children try to get to the top through force.
- **Chattering.** Children talk almost incessantly in order to be noticed.
- **Bossing.** Children try to dominate others.
- **Fighting.** Children pick fights and may even get hurt in order to be noticed.
- **Overeating.** Children overeat as a compensation for approval.
- **Becoming a model child.** Children assume the role of the perfect child—kind, polite, studious, quiet, thoughtful, neat—in order to be assured of a place in their families' affections. These children keep their normal feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety, and jealousy hidden out of fear that their family will stop loving them if these "bad" feelings are shown. These children are successful at covering up their real selves and have no self-confidence.
- **Submission and withdrawal.** Children who are unable to work out defenses, usually children who are more passive by nature, just give up or withdraw when they cannot win the approval of their family. These children stop trying to win

approval. They may turn to daydreaming in their own safe world.

Families Can Help Build High Self-Confidence

Families can help their children develop high self-confidence. The answer is not just in spending lots of time with youngsters, buying them material gifts, or bestowing hugs and kisses. Here are the necessary ingredients to help boost children's self-confidence.

- **Nurturing love.** This love is tender and caring. It means that we value children just because they exist. Children are dear even if they don't always do the right things, don't meet expectations, or don't perform the way families want. It is a love that does not criticize and demand.
- **Direct Involvement.** Children need some time when their family's attention is focused only on them. This focused time can be a shared activity or short talk, but it must include the family's undivided attention. Distractions and distancing make children feel that families don't care. Youngsters need focused attention most when they are under stress: at the time of a death or illness in the family, arrival of a new baby, divorce, move, or change of school.
- **Trust.** The basis of a child's safety is trust. Families lay the groundwork for trust by telling small children where they are going and when they will return (rather than sneaking out to avoid children's tears) and then doing what they promised. Families should avoid making promises they cannot keep.
- **Honesty.** Families have all sorts of feelings and should not hide them. It takes strength to bring feelings into the open and deal with them. If families share their feelings, children will learn that they do not have to hide their feelings. Children are confused when families say one thing but exhibit unspoken clues that say another. (Example: When a parent is feeling cranky and his child asks what's wrong; the parent says, "Nothing.") Families do not have to explain everything in order to be open with their children, but they would be more honest if they matched actions and words. ("I'm worried about an adult problem, and I'd rather not discuss it now.")
- **Praise.** Families should give helpful praise to children, letting them know they appreciate their efforts, work, help, consideration, or creations. Avoid praise that makes a personal judgment. Say "Thank you for vacuuming. The rug looks like new," rather than "You are such a good girl." (Along these same lines, families should keep their criticism constructive rather than destructive. Say "It hurts Mary's feelings when she is called names," rather than "You're mean.")
- **Empathy.** Families should watch for signs that show how a child feels. Action and words are important. Families should try to remember how they felt when they were young and they failed a test, argued with a friend, or didn't make a team. Show empathy by truly understanding how a child feels. Families can show that they understand by remarks such as "It really must have hurt your feelings" or "You seem very disappointed."
- **Reasonable expectations.** Accept children for themselves, not for their degree of performance. Families must be careful not to put too much pressure on children to do more and better. Encourage children to strive for goals that are important to them and are realistic. Families should educate themselves about the stages children pass through and what skills they possess at different ages so that they form reasonable expectations of their children. It may help for families to ask themselves about their children's expectations.

____Why do I have this expectation?
____Where did it come from?
____What's in it for me?
____Is this expectation based on my needs or my child's?
____What purpose does it serve?
____Does it realistically fit this particular child with his or her age, temperament, and background?

Positive Discipline

Discipline means entirely different things to different families. Discipline is directed at developing individuals who are in control of their own actions and who accept the responsibility of those actions. Families set the ground rules and expectations, and enforce these rules, in order to help their children develop self-discipline.

Suggestions For Developing Positive Discipline

- **Model good behavior**. Children learn the most by what they observe.
- **Have a routine** and follow it. Be firm, not loud nor mean.
- **Enjoy your children**. Spend time with them. Let them know you like them and admire their good qualities. Reward them occasionally.
- **Make household rules clear** to children. Set rules that are important and reasonable; then be firm in expecting children to comply.
- **Avoid unnecessary "no's"** by focusing on what children can do instead of what they can't do. Provide positive alternatives, such as, "You may not throw blocks in the house, but you may stack them or make a design."
- **Check expectations**. Examine whether you are expecting more mature behavior or more control than your children can achieve at their age.
- **Offer children choices** that minimize power plays between family and child and develop responsibility and independence in children. When children make choices and accept the consequences of their acts, the learning experience is enhanced.
- **Use punishment sparingly**. Before punishing, give a warning that the behavior is to stop at once. If it continues, punishment should follow immediately. Remain calm since anger may engender hate feelings in the person being punished.
- **Avoid physical punishment**. When necessary, hold a child back from something harmful or physically move the child. Do not strike or shake the child. Short periods of isolation or withholding privileged activities can be effective and focus on the behavior rather than on self-concept.
- **Be consistent and predictable**. Children must see that you mean what you say and that you follow through when you correct them.
- **Encourage your children** to respect proper authority. Certain rules must be followed. Help your children understand that it is harmful to them and others to constantly argue with adults and peers.
- **Allow occasional tantrums**, as long as children are not hurting themselves or others. Young children who do not have verbal skills may scream and jump when they are upset. When the tantrum is over, invite the child back into your life by suggesting you do something together.
- **Give older children space**. Teens may need to go to their room or leave the house until they cool down. Before disciplining, think about the consequences of the disciplinary action. They should be something you can live with and something that's appropriate to your child's age and emotional maturity.
- **Angry tones are OK** when one must convey an urgent meaning, such as suddenly finding a child walking out into a street. It is important that the child receives the message immediately.
- In most cases, a firm tone and serious look will effectively indicate to the child the earnestness of a family member's message.

Does Parenting Style Matter?

Does the parenting style—authoritative, dominating, permissive—used in rearing children have anything to do with how teens handle peer pressure, obey curfews, spend money, do chores, finish homework, choose friends, watch television, resist smoking?

Authoritative

Authoritative families are responsive. They express warmth and caring to their children often. They respect their children's feelings and ideas. They provide verbal explanations and talk over things with their children in ways that show they really care. They provide praise and encouragement. These families are high in responsiveness. Children of these families are more likely to feel good about themselves and comply with family requests. They learn to be more considerate of others, self-confident, and eventually make their own decisions.

Authoritative families are also demanding. They expect a high level of responsibility for their child's age. For example, they may expect help with household tasks or demand politeness and consideration in relationships with others. Demanding families set clear limits, and standards are consistently enforced. Sometimes this is called "freedom within limits."

When families are demanding, children learn to feel competent and self-reliant—able to do things for themselves. On the other hand, when families make few demands, they may be underestimating their child's abilities or showing they don't care enough to help their child learn to be self-sufficient. Studies found that children whose families make a few demands are more immature and less self-controlled than children of more demanding families.

Dominating

Dominating families are just as demanding, but less responsive, than authoritative families. Dominating families see themselves as the authority, the boss who has control over their children. They use rewards and punishments as tools for keeping everyone in line. Children are told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. There is very little room for children to question, challenge, or disagree.

Children of dominating families are obedient but their behavior is motivated more by fear of punishment than self-control. In addition, children of dominating families tend to be less independent, more withdrawn, have more difficulty getting along with others, have lower self-esteem, and lack self-confidence.

When the family or family authority figure is not around, the child may seize the opportunity to misbehave. Many studies of juvenile delinquents found their families practiced the dominating style of discipline with little explanation and sometimes considerable physical punishment, which resulted in their child's defiant, antisocial, rebellious behavior.

Permissive

Permissive families are highly responsive but not very demanding. These permissive families allow their children to "do their own thing." They provide little in the way of consistent guidance or limitations. They act like rugs, allowing their children to walk all over, coerce, or manipulate them to get their own way. They are highly caring and affectionate and allow much verbal give-and-take.

Children of permissive families tend to be impulsive and immature. As children grow, they push against the limits of their environment. This is good, necessary in fact. When families fail to set clear and consistent limits, their children feel insecure and confused. They may not be able to control their impulses and, as a result, may find themselves in trouble with others. When families set limits that are too rigid, and unresponsive to children's new abilities, then children also suffer by losing a chance to act more maturely.

Conclusion

Some families fit under more than one of these styles. The three parenting styles are pure types. Only about half of all families fit into these pure types.

Studies of children of authoritative families show they are more likely to internalize their families' values, think for themselves, and behave well even when their families are absent. Children who receive authoritative parenting are more socially and intellectually competent. They get along with peers better, are cooperative, and are likely to lead their social groups. They approach intellectual challenges with enthusiasm, rather than anxiety.

Early adolescents who receive authoritative parenting are less susceptible to peer pressure, less likely to engage in early drinking and truancy, and less likely, by age 20, to be a problem drinker or to have been arrested.

Why does authoritative parenting work better? Children need rules, but they also need to learn the reasons for rules and how to make rules themselves. Instead of giving no rules (permissive) or saying "Do it because I said so" (dominating), the authoritative family explains why the rule is needed: "Don't play behind the shed, because there is broken glass back there and you could get cut."

Families are especially likely to give reasons when their children are allowed to question or discuss rules. In hearing their families' explanations, these children learn how their families use their values and reasoning to make rules. Later, when their families are not around, these children will have learned to do the same, to apply family values and reasoning to make good rules for themselves.

Written by Donna Doll-Yogerst, University of Wisconsin Extension Family Living Agent, Oconto County.

Saving the Family Meal

Families concur with experts in hailing the importance of eating meals together. In a poll, 63 percent of families with children seven to seventeen years old said they ate dinner together frequently.

It is increasingly difficult, however, to put a meal on the table and get the family to the table. Families need to know they are right in insisting upon eating together. Kids need the parenting and the nutrition. Now, how do they make it happen?

No Apologies, Please

Family meals are an essential part of the structure that every family needs in order to function. A regular meal time makes checking in with the family a priority. That really becomes important during the teen years when kids are on their own for most of the day.

It is your right and obligation as a family to keep in touch with your children—no apologies allowed. Family meals are also essential for allowing kids to establish good lifetime food habits and nutritionally adequate diets. Families program their children to eat well when they regularly present them with nutritious food in the environment that only a family meal can offer.

Getting Them There

Be flexible. Once families establish that there will be a family meal, the way it happens can be negotiable. A little ingenuity goes a long way. One family meets at a fast food restaurant on Wednesday nights after the soccer game. Another family eats dinner right after the children arrive home from school because Dad is home then and everyone is hungry. A third family has a substantial breakfast instead of a large dinner because the morning is the only time they can all be together.

Keep meals enjoyable. Try not to use mealtimes for airing gripes or disciplining. Talk about touchy issues, but don't aim at resolving them there. Use meal times for listening to each other's views and keep the conversation pleasant or nobody will want to be there!

Expect good behavior at the table. Excuse children who won't behave properly. Being at the table is a privilege that children have to earn by helping to make it pleasant for everyone. Teach them to pass the food or say, "No, thank you," if they don't want to eat it.

Allow children to be children. Young children spill, use utensils awkwardly, and occasionally find it easier to eat with their fingers. Don't make them so preoccupied with neatness that they forget to eat.

At the Table

Divide responsibility in feeding—adults should decide what to eat, and children may decide how much and even whether to eat. Children actually eat better when they are not pressured to eat. Your job is to plan the menu, get the food on the table, and preserve a pleasant mealtime. The child's job is to eat—or choose not to eat.

Expose your children to a variety of foods. Even if they don't eat certain foods at first, they will be getting used to them and eventually will eat them. In the meantime, they won't starve if you have a variety of foods, have bread on the table, and let them pick and choose from what is available.

Maintain structured and regular meals and snacks. Forbid panhandling for food in between meals, and don't let the kids raid the refrigerator just before or just after a meal. Let them know that they'll have to wait until their next meal or snack time to eat, then let them decide what they will do about eating their meal.

Holding the line on the family meal is a matter of good parenting and good nutrition. Hang in there, and bon appétit!

Excerpted from How to Get Your Kid to Eat ... But Not Too Much, *by Ellyn Satter.*

Help Teens Establish Values

Values are transmitted to the child by the family. Children learn by example; they follow suit. A family's lifestyle, stability, sense of commitment, and relationships may influence a child's values and decision-making mechanism.

Why are some families able to cope in the face of life's stresses while other families become frustrated or appear to fall apart? Hamilton McCubbin, dean of the School of Family Resources and Consumer Sciences at the University Wisconsin-Madison, studied 300 midwestern families and found two types of families stronger and happier than others. He called them "hardy" and "rhythmic" families.

Hardy Families

- These families were optimistic in the face of difficulties.
- They met challenges head-on and were committed to working through problems.
- They had confidence in each other and in their problem-solving abilities.
- They believed they had the power to solve their own problems rather than to be controlled by fate.

Rhythmic Families

- These families felt it important that they spend time together.
- They had weekly family outings, shared household chores, and ate at least one meal together daily.
- They spent quiet time together in the evenings when they talked or played games together.
- They had organized routines, such as children doing homework and going to bed at the same time each night, families and children taking time to pursue a hobby or sport together, or children playing alone or with friends each day.

Values Are Caught

Values are not only taught, they are caught. The old adage that actions speak louder than words is true when it comes to helping children establish their own system of values. It is hard for a teenager to accept the value of good citizenship if family members never vote or attend a civic meeting. It is hard for teenagers to value honesty if families boast about cheating on their income taxes. It is hard for children to appreciate their school if they hear their families complain about school and teachers.

If families are involved in their school and community, teens will become involved persons. Teens mirror the words and actions of their families. Families' involvement in their children's academic life will have an important effect on children's achievement in school.

Communication Is Important

Communication is a critical element in helping teens develop values. Teens need to hear their families talk openly about what they do and believe, why they are making certain decisions, and the reasons behind their convictions.

Keep the lines of communication open during a teenager's high school years. Plan new activities to do together such as learning a new sport, taking a class, building something for the house. It is important to spend time with teens, not only to share activities and a growing relationship, but also to create opportunities for discussions.

Here are a few thoughts for families:

- When your teen talks, listen—don't interrupt.
- Be open-minded; don't judge.
- Allow your teen to express emotions.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Show interest in your teen's activities.
- Support your teen's growing independence.
- Ask your teen for his or her thoughts on some of your problems.
- Allow teens to make their own decisions and mistakes.
- Be kind and show respect for your teen.
- Be patient when you can't understand or agree with your teen.
- Remember that there are two lasting gifts families give their children: roots and wings.

How to Communicate When You're Angry

Family members work long hours, answer the needs of their family, and are often involved with many activities outside the home. In addition to these stresses, sometimes families are disappointed in their children's behavior. These things may cause family members to lash out in anger at their children.

Do Not Use Threats

- "If you do that one more time..."
- "Just wait until your dad comes home..."
- "This is the last time I'm going to let you..."
- "Your brother never gets into trouble at school."
- "How stupid! I thought you knew better."
- "You're so careless, you're driving me crazy."

These statements will let children know you are angry, but they are not communicating the right message to children. These remarks attack the person rather than the behavior. Children who hear these negative statements

- may think their family is disappointed in them as a person and may wonder if they are still loved;
- may not know exactly what they have done wrong;
- may not know why their behavior bothers a family member;
- may feel they cannot ever please their family and will stop trying;
- may have their self-confidence destroyed; and
- may lose their desire to communicate with their family.

Correcting Behavior

To correct children's behavior without ruining their self-confidence, families must

- describe the behavior that is causing the problem;
- tell how they feel about the behavior; and
- explain why the behavior bothers them.

(Examples: "When you are late, I feel very angry because I worry that something might have happened to you." "When you don't wash the dishes, I feel frustrated because it makes it harder for me to cook dinner." "When I found out you lied to me, I felt upset because I want to be able to trust you.")

Communication Tips

When family members feel angry, and there is a need to communicate with their children, they should follow these tips.

- **Focus full attention on the child**. Eliminate distractions by turning off the TV, and discourage other children from interrupting.
- **Listen**, without interrupting, to what the child says, even if you disagree.
- **Hold your response**. Stop and ask yourself, "What is my child really trying to tell me?"
- **Restate** what you have heard by repeating what the child said; for example, "It sounds as if you wish you were invited to Mark's party" or "I guess you are worried about giving your book report tomorrow."
- **Tell the child that you still love him or her**, but that his or her behavior is not acceptable. See if together you can arrive at a solution.

Reprinted with permission from Supporting Young Adolescents: A Guide to Leading Parent Meetings, *Granville, OH: Quest International, 1987.*

Teens in Your Family? Read This!

Today's teens feel more pressure and face greater dangers than teens of previous generations. They also need the support of their families more than ever before. Families should not always expect to understand teens, but they are expected to give caring support. Here are some helpful tips and considerations.

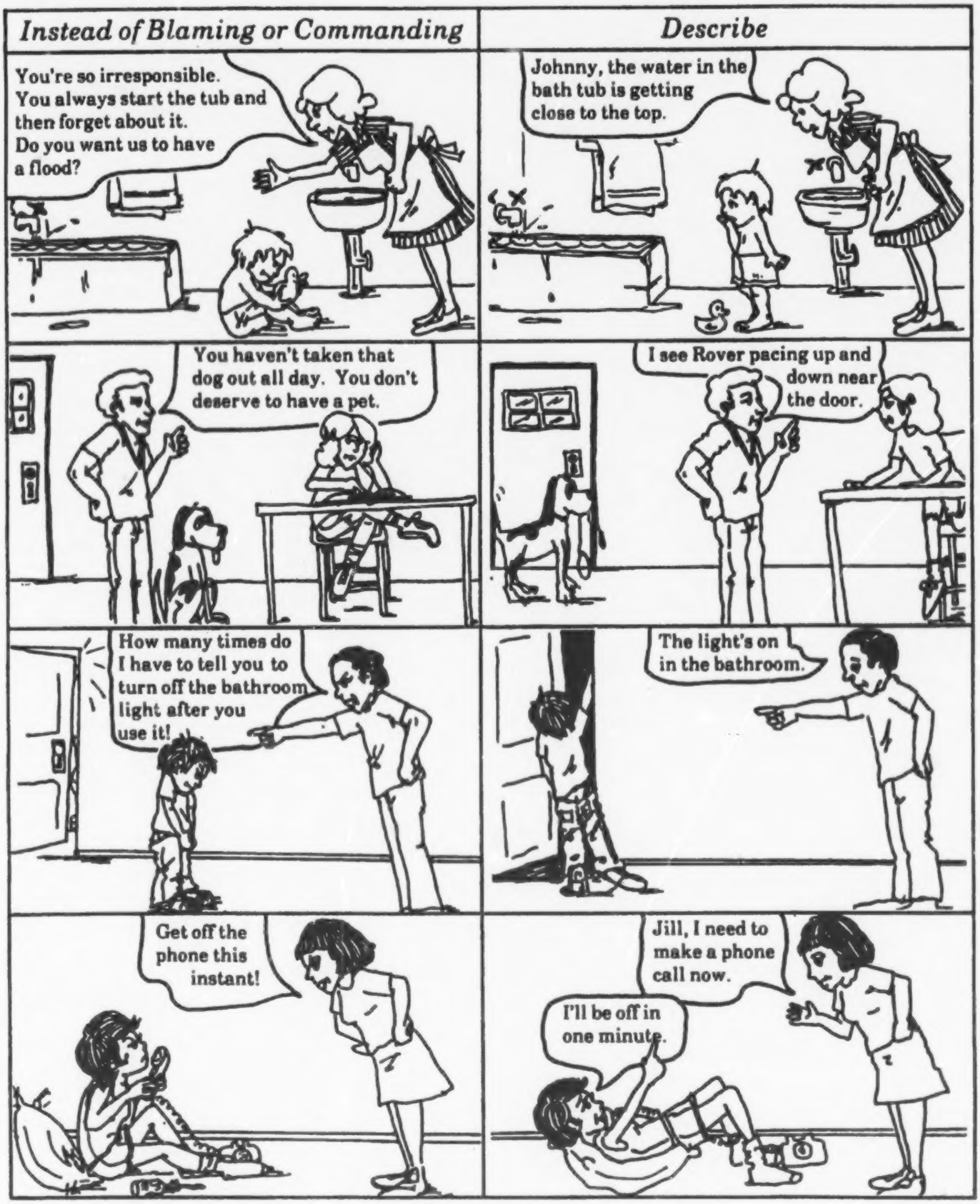
- A teen's behavior is sometimes childish, sometimes adult. Don't let it confuse you.
- Most teens don't like physical shows of affection, especially when their friends are around. Use words to let them know you care.
- Tell your teens about the facts of life early even if they say, "I know that."
- Set reasonable curfews and stick to them.
- Teens will not always meet your expectations. They are not perfect; neither are adults and families.
- Teens need privacy; it's thinking and growing time.
- A teen's allowance should not depend on performance; it should be a dependable thing he or she uses to learn how to manage money.
- Teens express themselves by their clothes. Their choice of clothes may look awkward to you, but they may be giving your teen a sense of individuality and self-confidence.
- Teens need a room, nook, shelf, cabinet, or drawer they can call their own.
- Discipline teens only when reasonable expectations are not met. Be sure you explain clearly, in advance, what you want them to do.
- Encourage open discussion and try not to impose your opinions; show respect for your teenager.
- Remember that teens imitate your words and actions.
- All teens say "Everyone's doing it." Set guidelines that fit into your family's value system.
- Give your teens opportunities to make decisions; allow them a voice in making rules, selecting classes, and learning activities.
- Avoid power struggles; remember that too much control causes rebellion.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Don't try too hard to communicate. Listen and be open-minded.
- Talk calmly instead of yelling or preaching.
- If you are angry about something else, cool down before talking to your teen.
- Teens need to see adult role models admit their mistakes and apologize for certain actions.
- Use neutral situations like a TV show or news article to bring up and discuss topics such as sex or alcohol and other drug use.
- Daily conversation about school between families and children is one of the things strongly associated with students' high grades.
- Give teens opportunities to interact with peers to help them acquire a sense of belonging. Teens need to feel part of a larger group.
- To help teens learn responsibility, give guidance, set clear limits for behavior, and provide enough structure to ensure that teens' efforts are met with success rather than failure.
- Give teens opportunities to have others depend on them; teens learn accountability when youngsters, the elderly, or tutored students need them.

How Teens Want Families to Communicate

Ideas for this article were contributed by members of a talented and gifted English class at James Madison Memorial High School, Madison. Their words create a clear picture of how they wish their families would talk with them.

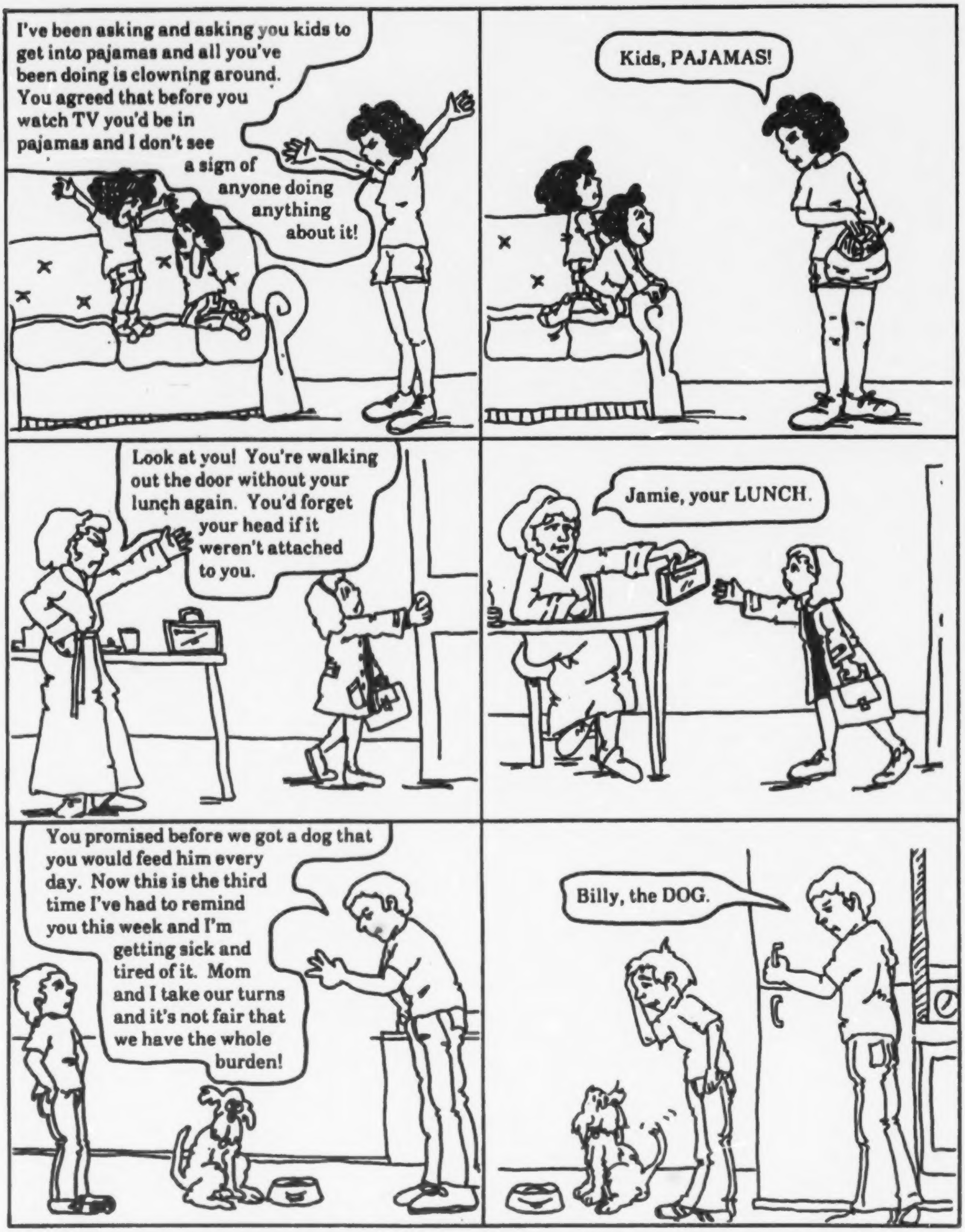
- **Don't pressure us to achieve all the time**. We do our best, but we also get tired. Remind us from time to time to slow down, goof off, do something silly. We can't always make the goals you've set for us, because some of them are too far off the ground.
- **Be honest with us**. Sooner or later we will find out the truth, and it makes us feel dumb if we were lied to. Besides, if we know the truth, we can help instead of becoming part of the problem.
- **Tell us you love us**—even if we act like we don't want to hear it. A hug or a pat on the back is always a nice bonus.
- **Praise us if we do OK**. Sometimes it seems like nothing we do is enough.
- **Skip the lectures**, please. A word or two and a check to see if we understand the message usually does the trick. Most of us know we've made a mistake long before you talk to us about it anyway.
- **Don't yell**! Nothing makes us want to fight back more than being screamed at.
- **When we need help, give it to us**—OK? We don't need to be told that we really blew it this time, that you would never have made that sort of mistake, or that our siblings would never have done it. We need help in finding a way out of the mess, not a lecture that we're in trouble. We already know that part.
- **Let us know that you'll love us** even if we don't live up to your expectations. Let us know that you'll always be there for us, no matter what.
- **Help us solve a major problem**, if we have one. Don't solve it for us, or we'll never learn how to function as adults.
- **Let us form our own opinions** about some things. Chances are they'll be a lot like yours if you've brought us up right.
- **Hear us out first** if we've got a collective problem, before assuming you're right and we're wrong. Give us a chance to disagree with you without telling us that we're "talking back." We need to develop that part of our communication system, too.
- **Tell us if you're angry, mad, sad, or whatever**, so we don't say or do the wrong thing. We know how it can be, and the last thing we want to do is make the situation worse.
- **Don't bring up the same issue** over and over again. Getting told off once is usually enough.
- **We love to hear about when we were little**, and we like to hear about your teenage years as well. But don't use those stories just to teach us a lesson or make a point about how good we have it. The stories are fun just by themselves.
- **Never stop talking to us**. You are the only ones we can count on for reassurance and love.

Describe


Instead of Blaming or Commanding
Describe
You're so irresponsible. You always start the tub and then forget about it. Do you want us to have a flood?
Johnny, the water in the bath tub is getting close to the top.
You haven't taken that dog out all day. You don't deserve to have a pet.
I see Rover pacing up and down near the door.
How many times do I have to tell you to turn off the bathroom light after you use it!
The light's on in the bathroom.
Get off the phone this instant!
Jill, I need to make a phone call now.
I'll be off in one minute.

Reprinted with permission. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. How to Talk So Kids Will Listen. *Negotiation Institute, Inc. 230 Park Avenue, Suite 460, New York, NY 10169. 1980.*

Say It With a Word


I've been asking and asking you kids to get into pajamas and all you've been doing is clowning around. You agreed that before you watch TV you'd be in pajamas and I don't see a sign of anyone doing anything about it!
Kids, PAJAMAS!
Look at you! You're walking out the door without your lunch again. You'd forget your head if it weren't attached to you.
Jamie, your LUNCH.
You promised before we got a dog that you would feed him every day. Now this is the third time I've had to remind you this week and I'm getting sick and tired of it. Mom and I take our turns and it's not fair that we have the whole burden!
Billy, the DOG.

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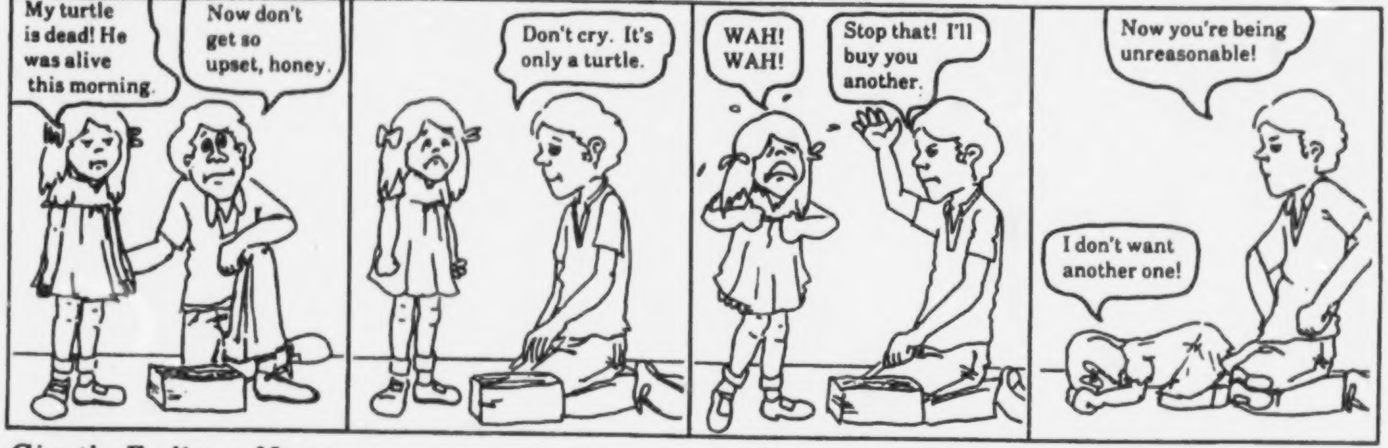
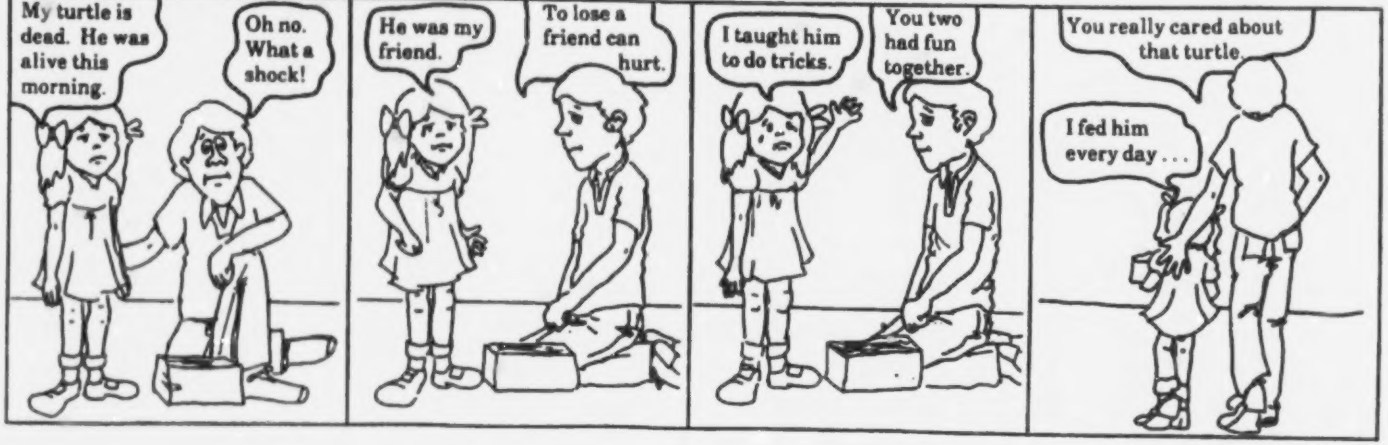
Instead of Denying the Feelings

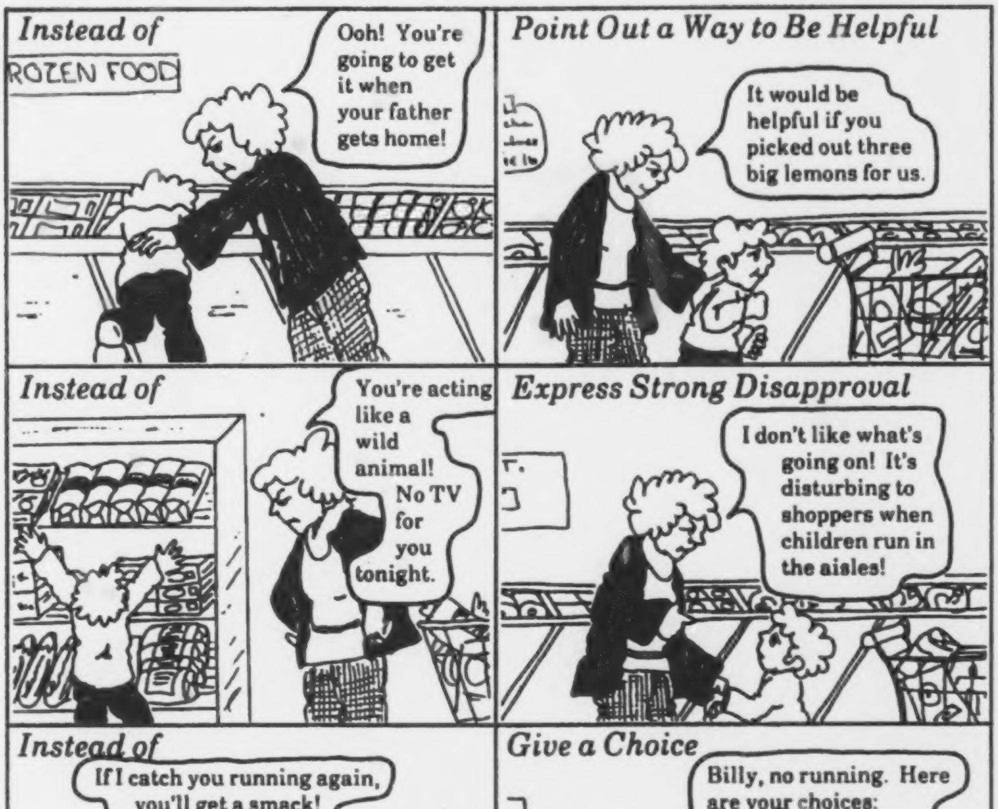

My turtle is dead! He was alive this morning.
Now don't get so upset, honey.
Don't cry. It's only a turtle.
WAH! WAH!
Stop that! I'll buy you another.
Now you're being unreasonable!
I don't want another one!

Give the Feeling a Name


My turtle is dead. He was alive this morning.
Oh no. What a shock!
He was my friend.
To lose a friend can hurt.
I taught him to do tricks.
You two had fun together.
You really cared about that turtle.
I fed him every day . . .

Reprinted with permission. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. How to Talk So Kids Will Listen. *Negotiation Institute, Inc. 230 Park Avenue, Suite 460, New York, NY 10169. 1980.*

Some Alternatives to Punishment


Instead of
ROZEN FOOD
Ooh! You're going to get it when your father gets home!
Point Out a Way to Be Helpful
It would be helpful if you picked out three big lemons for us.
Instead of
You're acting like a wild animal! No TV for you tonight.
Express Strong Disapproval
I don't like what's going on! It's disturbing to shoppers when children run in the aisles!
Instead of
If I catch you running again, you'll get a smack!
MEAT DEPT.
Give a Choice
Billy, no running. Here are your choices: You can walk or you can sit in the cart. You decide.
Instead of
You asked for it!
WHAM!
SMASH!
Take Action (REMOVE OR RESTRAIN)
I see you decided to sit in the cart!

Reprinted with permission. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. How to Talk So Kids Will Listen. *Negotiation Institute, Inc. 230 Park Avenue, Suite 460, New York, NY 10169. 1980.*

Should Your Teen Work During the School Year?

Many adults think work is good for teenagers. It teaches them about the "real" world, responsibility, and finances. But do teens really get all of these benefits?

For most kids, the answer is, "No," according to *When Teenagers Work* by researchers Ellen Greenberger and Laurence Steinberg. The book is a five-year study Greenberger and Steinberg conducted on teen employment. It showed that

- most jobs held by teens today do not lead to adult employment as factory, farm, and skilled-trades jobs did in the past;
- most teens work with other teens rather than with adults who could teach them something about the "real" world;
- most jobs require a few skills, so teens get little valuable training;
- only one in five teens actually contributes to the family finances; and
- more than 80 percent of teens spend the money they earn on items such as clothes, cars, hobbies, and movies, instead of saving it to pursue future education.

Other studies have shown that teenagers who work more than 20 hours a week during the school year suffer lower grades, take fewer and less challenging academic courses, and are more likely to use alcohol and other drugs and get in trouble with the law.

Furthermore, Greenberger and Steinberg found that many teens who spend money frivolously and have monotonous jobs develop cynical attitudes about the value of productive work. At a time when school reform efforts are demanding more time for homework and studying, making and spending money to gratify short-term goals becomes the top priority for many working teens at the price of long-term educational goals.

What Can Families Do?

Families should discuss the long-term educational, social, and financial benefits of a job with their teenager. If the work will benefit a youngster, it should provide some skill or knowledge that will be valuable in adult life and should bring them into contact with adults who care about preparing them for adulthood. The money earned should be saved for the youngster's future needs.

About Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

Much attention is given to family influence in the use of alcohol and other drugs. A student's decision to try alcohol and other drugs is influenced primarily by early family environment. Families are the most important influence in their children's lives. Families' words and actions carry great power with children.

Factors That May Predict Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

Here are some factors that may predict alcohol and other drug abuse.

- Family history of alcoholism
- Family management problems, especially families with much discord and violence
- Family alcohol or other drug use and attitudes toward use
- Lack of social bonding to society
- Exposure to ads that encourage drinking
- Ways in which family handles alcohol during celebrations and holidays
- Siblings who use drugs
- Sexual abuse
- Chronic depression
- Peer groups involved in alcohol and other drugs
- Poor self-concept

Is My Child Using Drugs?

There are certain behaviors that can warn a family that their child may be involved with alcohol and other drugs.

- Sudden decline in attendance or performance at work or school
- Ignoring curfews
- Impaired relationships with family or friends
- Unusual temper flare-ups or abrupt change in mood
- Increased borrowing of money from family or friends
- Stealing from home, school, or employer
- Heightened secrecy about actions and possessions
- Having alcohol or other drug paraphernalia
- Associating with a new group of friends, especially those who use alcohol or other drugs
- Being sick more often or skipping school
- Eating more or less than usual
- Having trouble sleeping

What Families Can Do

- Be a good role model.
- Be a family that encourages and loves children.
- Create positive family activities.
- Discuss the issue of alcohol and other drug abuse when children are young.
- Be loving and responsive.
- Increase your own self-esteem.
- Admit when you don't know something and offer to find the answer together.
- Speak up about advertising that glorifies drinking.
- Start giving children responsibilities at an early age.
- Help children develop problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Try to understand things from your children's perspective.
- Let other positive, life-giving people such as relatives, teachers, counselors, and others with positive values help you.
- Develop a sense of humor and have fun with your children.
- Give assistance to school and community projects that sponsor alcohol-free activities.

- Check on parties: Call to see if an adult is home and knows about the party.
- If your child has a party, be there. Be visible.
- Help schools develop programs and policies regarding alcohol and other drug abuse.

Available Resources

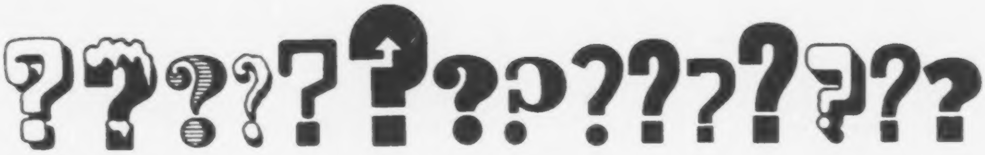
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Student Services, Prevention and Wellness Team
125 South Webster St.
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, WI 53707-7841
(608) 266-8960

Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Other Drug Information
P.O. Box 1468
Madison, WI 53701
(608) 263-2797
(800) 322-1468

Wisconsin Association on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse
2801 W. Beltline Highway, Suite 235
Madison, WI 53713
(608) 273-8616

Wisconsin Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth
P.O. Box 100
Two Rivers, WI 54241
(414) 794-7118

Wisconsin Prevention Network
711 W. Capitol Dr., Rm 210
Milwaukee, WI 53206
(414) 264-2660



About Sexuality

Families play a major role in educating their children about sexuality—even if they never speak a word to them about sex. Early nurturing helps children feel good about themselves, their bodies, and being touched. Families provide daily models for female and male opinions, behaviors, and relationships.

Talk about Sexuality

Although a great deal of this learning takes place without words, it is still essential for families to talk about sexuality with children. Unfortunately, talking about this subject is not always easy; families are uncertain about what to say and when to say it. Families are not alone if they feel unsure.

In spite of this uneasiness, ongoing family communication about sexuality is important. Some research suggests that intercourse starts later and there is a lower rate of teenage pregnancy among young people whose families have talked openly and honestly with them about sexuality. Inadequate information behind sexual decisions is frequently a contributing factor with negative consequences. Research also indicates that most children prefer to get sexuality information from families—although most of them don't. When young people don't get this information from families, they inevitably seek it from other sources.

Talk about Values

It is also important for families to explain their own values and beliefs about sexuality to their children. As children become preteens, they are greatly influenced by the values of friends whose beliefs may differ from those of their families. When this happens, families who can listen respectfully and discuss these differences patiently and without harsh criticism can help young people develop their own values, an essential aspect of growing up. With open communication, many families find children's values shift to be more like their own by early adulthood.

In short, it's a good idea for families to talk with their children—beginning in the preschool years—about sexuality. Now is the time to make a resolution to try. It's never too late to begin. Although it is not possible to make up for lost time in one "big talk," families can open lines of communication now and help keep them open.

Some Helpful Hints for Families

- **Know that it's OK to feel a little uneasy**. Just don't let it stop you from talking. You might even share your discomfort by saying something like "This isn't easy for me. My family didn't talk with me about sex, but I think it's too important not to talk about." Once shared, your uneasiness can actually be a common bond that makes ongoing communication easier.
- **Recall your own early curiosity and questions**. Decide whether and how you might want to make the experience of learning about sexuality different for your child. Such recollections may help you understand your child better and could be a starting point for discussion.
- **Be positive in discussing sexuality**. Avoid total reliance on fear messages. Remember that you want your child to become an adult who takes pleasure in her or his sexuality as well as one who makes responsible sexual decisions.
- **Be respectful of your daughter or son**. Be as respectful of a young person's personal viewpoints as you want her or him to be of yours—whether you agree or not. An explanation of why

you disagree is more helpful than put-downs or harsh criticism. Remember that your child considers a variety of differing values in the process of developing her or his own.

- **Gather the information you need**. The more confident you are about your knowledge, the easier it is to talk. Your public library, local school, religious institution, doctor's office, or family planning clinic are all possible sources of information.
- **Answer questions simply and directly** when they are asked. If questions are ignored or put off, your child may not ask again. Never laugh at a child's questions. If the question deals with opinions, you might talk about how and why you formed an opinion and ask for your child's point of view. Long-winded sermonizing can cut off future communication.
- **Listen carefully** to make sure you know what is being asked. Be alert to the possibility of hidden feelings, but don't jump to conclusions about why the question is being asked. For example, if your preteen asks about intercourse, don't assume she or he is actually engaging in this activity.
- **After answering a question, ask your child if you've answered it**. If not, clarify the question and try again. If so, ask if there are other questions.
- **Not knowing all the answers is OK**. No one knows all the answers about sexuality, so don't be afraid to admit it when you don't. Instead, you might offer to look up the answer with your child. The goal is to be "askable" and encourage further communication—not necessarily to be an expert—so how you listen and respond is more important than having the right answer.
- **Initiate discussions** even if no questions are asked. Assume curiosity and interest and take responsibility for bringing up the subject. Be alert for such "teachable moments" as pregnant friends or relatives, animal reproduction, TV programs, and newspaper articles. Even offensive incidents can provide a chance to say that you disapprove and to explain why.
- **Be informed** about your school's human growth and development program. These programs can complement your efforts and provide excellent opportunities for family-child discussion.
- **Realize that talking with young people** about sexuality is not a one-time project. Learning and mutual trust take time; they evolve slowly from ongoing two-way communication.
- **Consider other sources** of sexuality information. No matter how good the relationship between family and child, sometimes—for a variety of reasons—talking about sexuality just does not work. So it's important to provide other sources of information—pamphlets, books, videos, and other trusted adults such as family members and friends. As a family, you are an important sexuality educator for your child, but you don't have to do it alone.

Source: Bonnie Trudell, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

About Career Planning

One of the best ways to prepare children for a satisfying adulthood is to help them prepare for future work. Schools are becoming more involved in career development, and many school personnel are deeply committed to the students they serve. But the fact remains, families care more about their children than anyone! Families have the most impact on their children's success. These tips suggest ways to guide children's career development.

- Make sure your children have as well-rounded a background—academically and socially—as possible.
- Encourage your children to examine familiar and new careers, not only those available in your city or family tradition.
- Let your children make a list of occupations they find interesting and find out what kind of education or training is required for these occupations.
- To make effective choices about their future careers, children need to make decisions about other things on their own now.
- Ask your children to write down all the positive and negative things about a career they are currently considering.
- Ask your children to talk to the school counselor or a favorite teacher for a better understanding of classes they choose in high school. Talk about how each can affect their future.
- Notice the personal interests of your children and encourage hobbies with related magazine subscriptions, posters, hobby kit materials, and museum trips.
- Notice your children's favorite subjects. Link these subjects to occupations and take your children to visit someone involved in that occupation.
- Provide your children with information about assertiveness, respect for themselves and others, cooperation, conflict resolution, and acceptance of their feelings and opinions as valid.
- Talk to your children about the ways they are privileged and disadvantaged in our society. Help them become aware of the human worth and legal rights of people who don't have the advantages they enjoy. In discussing ways they are disadvantaged, affirm their wholeness and worthiness.
- Get more ideas about career development from your school counselor.
- Be sure your children understand the prerequisites for high school graduation and college or vocational education. These can be found in *Preparing for Life and Work, A Guide to High School Course Selection* from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
- If your children are disabled or gifted and talented, work closely with teachers to meet their special abilities.

Guidelines for Latchkey Children

Most children are dismissed from school earlier than employees are from work. That means for many families, after-school child care is a problem. Some children become "latchkey" children; they are home alone after school.

Discuss Safety Precautions With Children

Share these suggestions with your children to help them be safe.

- Do not display or loan the house key. A trusted neighbor will have an extra key.
- Try to walk home with friends. If you feel like you are being followed, run to the nearest public place, neighbor, or safe house.
- Go straight home. Don't delay or go to anybody else's house unless you get permission before leaving school.
- Don't speak with strangers on the way home.
- If you come home and a door is ajar or a window is broken, do not go inside. Go to a neighbor's house and call your family or the police. Be sure to give your address completely and clearly.
- Telephone your family or a neighbor as soon as you get home.
- Don't allow anybody in the door unless you have permission beforehand for the person to be inside.
- If you have friends at home, be sure your family knows about it and that your friends agree to house rules.
- Never allow them to do things in your home that you are forbidden to do, no matter what they say their family allows.
- Never tell anybody at the door or on the phone that you're home alone. Say your family is busy and that you'll take a message for them to call back.
- Tell your family if anyone asks you to keep a secret, offers gifts or money, or asks to take your picture.
- Know how to escape from a fire and how to treat minor cuts, burns, and nosebleeds.
- Know where all the emergency numbers are: police, fire, doctor, family members' work places.

Agree on Rules

- Agree on a routine, such as homework first, chores second, play third.
- Agree on daily responsibilities: letting a pet outside, cleaning up after a snack, using the telephone.
- Understand the etiquette of phone use and why nuisance calls may be dangerous.
- Know the rules about having friends over.

Evaluate Your Involvement

Are you involved in the education of your children? Read the items listed below and check those that apply to you. If you can check at least 25 of these items, you are probably an involved family; 24-20, moderately involved; 19 or less, not involved enough.

☐ I let my children know daily that I love and respect them.

☐ I read to my children.

☐ I talk to my children's teachers.

☐ I attend parent-teacher conferences.

☐ I attend family-teacher organization meetings.

☐ I attend school board meetings.

☐ I visit my children's classrooms.

☐ I check my children's homework.

☐ I know what my children are studying.

☐ I attend school activities in which my children are involved.

☐ I take my children to the library or a museum.

☐ I give my children a quiet place to study and uninterrupted study time each day.

☐ I encourage the interests and hobbies of my children.

☐ I allow my children to teach me things they learn.

☐ I arrange for my children to display or demonstrate things they have learned.

☐ I encourage my children to write (notes, letters, diary, forms).

☐ I give my children a chance to read to family members.

☐ I discuss with my children what we watch on television.

☐ I talk about why some movies are better than others.

☐ I make sure my children are offered well-balanced meals.

☐ I discuss house rules with my children.

☐ I teach basic safety rules to my children.

☐ I praise good efforts of my children.

☐ I hug my children.

☐ I help my children accept responsibility in the home and teach why this is important.

☐ I meet my children's friends.

☐ I am not afraid to discipline my children when necessary, but I temper it with love.

☐ I check to see if an adult is home when my children are invited to parties.

☐ I set definite, reasonable curfews.

☐ I encourage my children to help prepare meals, read recipes, and measure ingredients.

☐ I give my children freedom to make decisions that are age-appropriate.

☐ I teach my children to respect and accept others, no matter what their culture or race.

5

Selected Resources

Organizations and Programs
Family-Community Partnership with the Schools
A Checklist for Schools

Organizations

The organizations listed below provide a variety of support, services, resources and advocacy roles either directly or indirectly related to children, their families, and education.

Children's Defense Fund
25 E. Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
Legislative hotline: 202-662-3678
Fax: (202) 662-3540
Web site: http://www.tmn.com/cdf/index.html
E-mail: HN3208@handsnet.org
Publication: CDF Reports, monthly, $29.95

Center on Families, Communities, Schools and
Children's Learning
Johns Hopkins University
3305 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8800

Corporation for National and Community Service
1201 New York Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20525
(202) 606-5000

Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue N.W. #700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
(202) 336-7033

Families and Work Institute
330 Seventh Avenue 14th Floor
New York, NY 10001-5010
(212) 465-2044

Family Involvement Partnership for Learning
U.S. Department of Education
(800) USA-LEARN

Family-School-Community Partnerships
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
P. O. Box 7841
Madison, WI 53707-7841
Jane Grinde, (608) 266-9356
E-mail: grindjl@mail.state.wi.us
Ruth Anne Landsverk, (608) 266-9757
E-mail: landsra@mail.state.wi.us
Web site: http://www.state.wi.us/agencies/dpi

Harvard Family Research Project
38 Concord Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-9108
Fax: (617) 495-8594
Web site: http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp

Home and School Institute
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-3633

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

National Association for the Education of Young
Children
Public Affairs Division
1509 16th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1426
(800) 424-2460
Fax: (202) 986-9706
E-mail: AAUJ82A@prodigy.com

National Association of Partners
in Education
901 North Pitt Street, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

National Coalition for Parent Involvement
in Education
119 North Payne Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-6232

National Committee for Citizens in Education
10840 Little Patuxent Parkway #301
Columbia, MD 21044-3199
(301) 977-9300 or 1-800-NETWORK (638-9675)

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22030
(703) 359-8973
Fax (703) 359-0972

National Education Goals Panel
1255 22nd Street N.W. Suite 502
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 632-0952
Fax: (202) 632-0957

National Head Start Association
1651 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-0875 (information)
(800) 687-5044 (to order publications)
Web site: http://www.nhsa.org
Sustaining membership costs $30

National Parent Information Network
Project of the ERIC system
(800) 583-4135
Web site: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.educ/npin/
npinhome.html

National PTA
330 N. Wabash Avenue Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
(312) 670-6783
Web site: http://www.pta.org

National School Public Relations Association
1501 Lee Highway, Suite 201
Arlington, VA 22209
(703) 528-5840

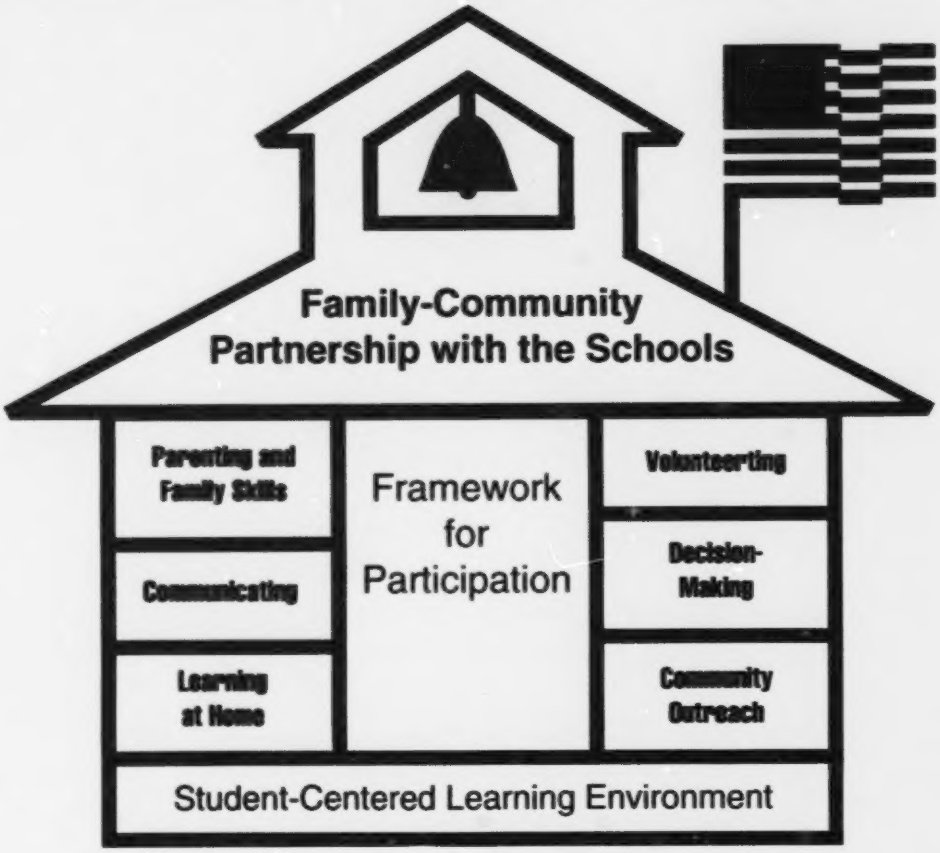
National School Volunteer Program
701 North Fairfax Street, #320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

The Parent Institute
P. O. Box 7474
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
(703) 323-9170
Orders: (800) 756-5525

Partnership-2000 Schools Network
Johns Hopkins University
3905 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8800
Fax: (410) 516-8890

University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living
637 Extension Building
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 263-1095

Wisconsin Intergenerational Network (WIN)
P.O. Box 5171
Madison, WI 53705-0171
(608) 238-7936


Family-Community
Partnership with the Schools
Parenting and Family Skills
Communicating
Learning at Home
Framework for Participation
Volunteering
Decision-Making
Community Outreach
Student-Centered Learning Environment

SIX TYPES OF FAMILY—COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Parenting—Build on parenting strengths and help families improve parenting skills. Facilitate support systems and networks to enable families to effectively nurture their children.

Communicating—Design and implement effective two-way communication practices to reach families, individually and collectively. These practices should ensure that families and school staff communicate back and forth about their children.

Learning at Home—Provide for families and school staff to work together in developing learning goals and offering opportunities for learning activities at home and in the community to meet the goals.

Volunteering—Recruit and organize volunteer participation from families and the community at-large.

Decision-Making—Design governance structure through which parents are partners in policy decisions so that families have opportunities to give their opinions and to participate in decision-making about school programs. Recruit families to act as advocates and decision-makers and represent other parents and families.

Community Outreach—Establish partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community.

**Based on the research of Joyce Epstein, co-director, Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University. Implementation through the League of Schools Reaching Out, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston.*

GETTING IT DONE

Leadership—Who is in charge and has the authority to organize and assign tasks? One person should be accountable for the results.

Analysis—What are the needs and challenges? What results do you want? Develop a basis for your efforts.

Planning and Policy Development—What must be done? How? Who will do it? What is the time line? School board policy and district and school procedures may need to be developed.

Action/Implementation—With the groundwork laid, how much of the plan can you put in place? While the six types of family-community participation for schools are interrelated and important for a comprehensive approach, determine what is possible and practical at any given time. Don't delay doing something because the whole plan is not in place.

Evaluation—What worked? What didn't? What needs changing or fine tuning? Listen and learn from experiences.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, John T. Benson, State Superintendent

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Checklist for Schools

Making Your Family-Community Partnership Work

Following are examples of practices and programs that schools and districts can use to encourage family and community support of children's learning. They are meant to be advisory and should be adapted to each school's or district's needs.

Parenting and Family Skills

☐ 1. We sponsor parent education and family learning workshops.

☐ 2. We ask families what types of workshops or informational events they would be interested in attending and what session times are most convenient for them.

☐ 3. We provide families with information on child development.

☐ 4. We lend families books and tapes on parenting and parent workshops.

☐ 5. We provide families with information about developing home conditions that support school learning.

☐ 6. We survey parents to determine their needs, assign staff members to help address those needs, and work to link parents with community resources.

☐ 7. We have a family resource center or help parents access other resource centers in the community.

☐ 8. We have support groups for families with special interests and needs.

☐ 9. We train staff members and support them in reaching out to all families.

Communicating

☐ 1. We have parent-teacher-student conferences to establish student learning goals for the year.

☐ 2. We listen to parents tell us about their children's strengths and how they learn.

☐ 3. We offer many ways throughout the year that parents and community members can learn about what is happening in the school and comment on it.

☐ 4. Teachers have ready access to telephones to communicate with parents during or after the school day.

☐ 5. Staff members send home positive messages about students.

☐ 6. We make efforts to communicate with all parents.

☐ 7. Parents know the telephone numbers of school staff members and the times teachers are available to take phone calls from parents.

☐ 8. We involve families in student award and recognition events.

☐ 9. We encourage and make provisions for staff members to talk with parents about the child's progress several times each semester.

☐ 10. We communicate the school's mission and expectations for students to parents. The school has a homework hotline or other kind of telephone system.

☐ 11. We provide parents with structured ways to comment on the school's communications, for example, with mailed, phone, or take-home surveys.

☐ 12. We have staff members available to assist and support parents in their interactions with the school (i.e. home-school liaisons).

13. We send home communications about
    - ☐ student academic progress
    - ☐ meetings at school
    - ☐ how parents can be involved in student activities
    - ☐ PTA/PTO
    - ☐ student discipline
    - ☐ child development
    - ☐ the curriculum
    - ☐ how parents can be involved as volunteers
    - ☐ how parents can be involved in school governance
    - ☐ how parents can help with homework and encourage learning at home
    - ☐ community resources available to families
    - ☐ how parents can communicate with school staff
    - ☐ the school's philosophy of learning

☐ 14. Staff members make home visits.

☐ 15. We directly speak to parents (does not include leaving messages on answering machines) if students are having academic difficulty or causing classroom disruptions **before** a crisis occurs.

☐ 16. We provide copies of school textbooks and publications about the school to the public library.

Learning at Home

☐ 1. We have a structured program to help parents assist their children with homework.

☐ 2. We offer learning activities and events for the whole family.

- ☐ 3. We invite parents to borrow resources from school libraries for themselves and their families.
- ☐ 4. We link parents with resources and activities in the community that promote learning.
- ☐ 5. We give parents questionnaires they can use to evaluate their child's progress and provide feedback to teachers.
- ☐ 6. School staff and school communications help parents link home learning activities to learning in the classroom.

Volunteering

- ☐ 1. We encourage families and other community members to attend school events.
- ☐ 2. We offer youth service learning opportunities for students who want to volunteer in the community.
- ☐ 3. We help school staff learn how to work with parent and community volunteers.
- ☐ 4. We **ask** family members how they would like to participate as volunteers at their child's school or in the community.
- 5. We encourage family and community members to become involved as
  - ☐ participants in site-based management councils
  - ☐ presenters to students on careers and other topics
  - ☐ assistants with art shows, read-aloud events, theater workshops, book swaps, and other activities
  - ☐ tutors/mentors
  - ☐ chaperones on field trips and other class outings
  - ☐ instructional assistants in classrooms, libraries, and computer labs
  - ☐ non-instructional assistants
  - ☐ from-the-home contributors of baked goods, assembling materials, typing, etc.
- ☐ 6. We have a program to recognize school volunteers.
- ☐ 7. We offer volunteer opportunities for working and single parents.
- ☐ 8. We gather information about the level and frequency of family and community participation in school programs.

Governance and Advocacy

- ☐ 1. We encourage parents to attend school board meetings.
- ☐ 2. We assign staff members to help parents address concerns or complaints.
- ☐ 3. We invite staff and parent groups to meet collaboratively.
- ☐ 4. We help families advocate for each other.
- 5. We involve parents in
  - ☐ revising school and district curricula
  - ☐ planning orientation programs for new families
  - ☐ developing parenting skills programs
  - ☐ establishing membership for site-based councils
  - ☐ hiring staff members

Community Outreach

- ☐ 1. We act as a source of information and referral about services available in the community for families.
- ☐ 2. We use a variety of strategies to reach out to adults, families, and children of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the community.
- ☐ 3. We encourage local civic and service groups to become involved in schools in a variety of ways such as mentoring students, volunteering, speaking to classes, and helping with fund-raising events.
- ☐ 4. We encourage staff and students to participate in youth service learning opportunities.
- ☐ 5. We open our school buildings for use by the community beyond regular school hours.
- ☐ 6. We work with the local chamber of commerce or business partnership council and public library to promote adult literacy.
- ☐ 7. We have a program with local businesses that enhances student work skills.
- ☐ 8. We widely publish and disseminate school board meeting notices, summaries, and board policies and agendas, and encourage the feedback and participation of community members.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Families in Education Program
Revised July 1994